

Basic Hygiene Guidelines for the Prevention of Staph Infections in Parish Schools



Staphylococcus aureus, more commonly known as “staph” are bacteria found on the skin or in the nose of healthy people. Approximately 25 percent to 30 percent of the populations carry the bacteria without becoming ill. Staph can cause minor skin infections (e.g., pustules, small boils) that can be treated without antibiotics. However, on occasion, staph bacteria can cause much more serious skin infections, as well as bloodstream infections, pneumonia, etc.

Over the past several years, treatment of some staph infections has become problematic because the bacteria have become resistant to various antibiotics.

Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) is a type of staph that is resistant to some antibiotics, including the antibiotic methicillin. Infections caused by MRSA historically have been associated with ill persons in health-care institutions. However, MRSA has now emerged as a common cause of skin and soft tissue infections that may occur in previously healthy adults and children who have not had prior contact with healthcare settings. This type of MRSA infection is known as community-associated MRSA or CA-MRSA.

CA-MRSA can be transmitted from person to person through close contact. Risk factors associated with the spread of MRSA include direct skin-to-skin contact with infected persons, sharing contaminated personal items such as towels, razors, soap and clothing, inadequate personal hygiene, direct contact with contaminated environmental surfaces, and living in crowded settings.

CA-MRSA infections are treatable; early recognition and good medical management including, as needed, surgical drainage, and proper antibiotic prescribing and usage, help to ensure prompt resolution of infections.

With this information in mind, it is important that staff, students and parents understand what to do to prevent infection. The following control measures are prudent in reducing the likelihood of spreading skin infections at school.

Hand Hygiene

Students, faculty and staff should be instructed on the correct technique for hand washing, including the importance of washing hands before eating or preparing food, after touching any skin lesions (“sores”) and wounds or clothing contaminated by drainage from lesions and wounds, and after using the restroom. Instructions should include the following:

- Turn on faucet and wet hands with running water.
- Apply soap and spread across all surfaces of hands.
- Scrub all surfaces of hands, including between each finger, for at least 20 seconds (saying the alphabet slowly will take at least 20 seconds).
- Rinse hands under running water.
- Dry hands with paper towels or air dryers.
- If available, use a paper towel to turn off faucet handles.

General Hygiene

Be sure to practice and follow general hygienic measures, including:

- Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water. Use an alcohol hand gel when soap and water are not available.
- Avoid sharing eating and drinking utensils.
- Avoid sharing unwashed towels, washcloths, clothing or uniforms.
- Avoid sharing personal items (e.g., deodorant, razors).
- Change socks and underwear daily.
- Wash bed linens and pajamas regularly, at least once a week if feasible.
- Wash soiled bed linens and clothes with hot water and laundry detergent. Drying clothes in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, also helps kill bacteria in clothes.
- Bathe or shower with soap each day.
- Bathe or shower with soap after every sports practice or competition.
- Keep cuts and abrasions clean and covered with clean, dry bandages until healed.
- Follow your health care provider's instructions on proper care of wounds.
- Avoid contact with other people's wounds or material contaminated by wounds.

Hygiene for Sports Participants

In addition to the previously mentioned recommendations, sports participants should be provided these recommendations:

- Do not share towels, clothing or uniforms.
- Don't store wet, dirty clothing in lockers.
- Avoid sharing personal equipment.
- Keep equipment clean. Follow coach's directions about cleaning the equipment.
- Keep cuts, abrasions and wounds covered with clean, dry bandages. Persons with draining wounds or infections are not allowed to participate in practices or games until the wound has stopped draining.
- Report any cuts, abrasions or wounds to the coach and school nurse.

Additional Measures

If multiple cases of *Staphylococcus aureus* infection are identified in a school, students and their parents, faculty and staff should be provided information about what *Staphylococcal aureus* is, how it is spread, and how staph infections can be prevented. The local health department may need to implement more stringent requirements during an outbreak.

-Information excerpted from the Illinois Department of Public Health, “Guidance for Schools and Student Athletes about Community-Associated Staphylococcus Aureus (CA-MRSA) Infections” and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).