

Ohio Department of Health Guidelines for Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) for Athletes and Coaches

Increasingly, outbreaks of skin infections associated with sports teams caused by *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria that are resistant to many antibiotics have been reported to public health officials. These resistant strains of “staph” are known as MRSA.

What is a staph skin infection?

Staph bacteria are often found in the nose and on the skin of people. Most of the time staph carried in the nose or on the skin does not cause infection. When it does, it usually causes minor infections, such as boils or abscesses. Sometimes staph can cause more serious infections such as pneumonia, joint and bloodstream infections. Staph infections often begin when staph bacteria enter the body through an injury to the skin. Symptoms of a staph skin infection include redness, warmth, swelling, tenderness, and boils or blisters. It may look like a “spider bite.”

How do staph skin infections spread?

The cleanest person can get a staph infection. Staph can rub off the skin of an infected person and onto the skin of another person when they have skin-to-skin contact. Staph from an infected person can also get onto a commonly shared item or surface, and then get onto the skin of the person who touches it next. There must be a break in the skin, such as a scratch or a scrape, in order for the bacteria from a surface or another person to cause an infection. Examples of commonly shared items are towels, benches in saunas or hot tubs and athletic equipment

What can be done to prevent infection among athletes?

Athletes should clean their hands and skin often. They should avoid skin-to-skin contact with anyone suspected of having a staph skin infection. Athletes should not share personal items such as razors or towels, and they should keep towels and clothes clean by washing after each use. Items that are shared with other people, such as athletic equipment, should be cleaned before use by another person.

What should I do if I think an athlete has a skin infection?

If you suspect that an athlete might have a staph skin infection, have them consult their health care provider as soon as possible. Early treatment can help prevent the infection from getting worse. The athlete should be sure to follow all the directions the health care provider gives, including taking all of the doses of any prescribed antibiotic.

If an athlete is diagnosed with an MRSA skin infection what should be done?

The following recommendations for controlling MRSA outbreaks on sports teams have been adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

1. Cover all wounds. If a wound cannot be covered adequately, consider excluding players with potentially infectious skin lesions from practice or competitions until the lesions are healed or can be covered adequately. An adequately covered wound is one where the bandage covers the entire infected area and remains dry and intact throughout a practice or competition.
2. Require good hygiene, including showering and washing with soap after all practices and competitions.
3. Ensure availability of adequate soap and hot water.
4. Prohibit sharing of towels and personal items (e.g., clothing, towels or razors).
5. Enforce a routine cleaning schedule for all shared equipment.
6. Train athletes and coaches in first aid for wounds and recognition of wounds that are possibly infected.
7. Require athletes to report skin lesions to coaches and require coaches to assess athletes regularly for skin lesions.