

# Staph Infection Prevention: What You Can Do To Protect Yourself And Your Students

FACT SHEET FROM NEA HIN

"Staph" are bacteria commonly carried on the skin or in the nose of otherwise healthy people. Staph is the shortened name for *Staphylococcus*, a type of bacteria that is one of the most common causes of skin infection in the U.S. These skin infections make look like a pimple or boil and can be red, swollen, painful or have pus or other drainage. Most staph infections can be treated by drainage of pus with or without antibiotics.

However, staph can also cause more serious infections, such as bloodstream infections and pneumonia. MRSA is a type of staph that resists treatment by antibiotics. In the U.S., MRSA causes more than 94,000 acute infections and 19,000 deaths annually (*JAMA*, 10/ 17/ 07). Approximately 1% of the U.S. population is colonized by the MRSA-type of bacteria (meaning that bacteria are present, but not causing infection).

While MRSA skin infections can occur anywhere, settings that have the "5 C" factors make it more easily transmittable: Crowding, Frequent Skin-to-Skin Contact, Compromised Skin (abrasions or cuts), Contaminated Items and surfaces, and Lack of Cleanliness.

## *How to prevent staph or MRSA skin infections from occurring*

1. Practice good hygiene: keep your hands clean by washing with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer and shower immediately after participating in exercise.
2. Cover skin trauma such as abrasions or cuts with a clean dry bandage until healed.
3. Avoid sharing personal items (e.g., towels, razors) that come into contact with your bare skin and use a barrier (e.g., clothing or a towel) between your skin and shared equipment such as weight-training benches.
4. Maintain a clean environment by establishing cleaning procedures for frequently touched surfaces and surfaces that come into direct contact with people's skin.

## *How to prevent spreading staph or MRSA skin infections to others (once it is acquired)*

1. Cover the wound. Keep wounds that are draining or have pus covered with clean, dry bandages until healed.
2. Clean hands frequently. Family and others in close contact should wash their hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially after changing the bandage or touching the infected wound.
3. Do not share personal items such as towels, washcloths, razors, clothing, or uniforms that may have had contact with the infected wound or bandage. Wash sheets, towels, and clothes that become soiled with water and laundry detergent. Use a dryer to dry clothes completely.

## *School procedures when an MRSA infection occurs*

The decision to close a school for any communicable disease should be made by school officials in consultation with local/state public health officials. In general it is not necessary to close schools to "disinfect" them when MRSA infections occur. Refer to advice column for cleaning and disinfecting procedures.

## Advice for Custodial and Maintenance Staff:

- When MRSA skin infections occur, cleaning and disinfection should be performed on surfaces that are likely to contact uncovered or poorly covered infections.
- Cleaning surfaces with detergent-based cleaners or EPA-registered disinfectants is effective at removing MRSA from the environment. Be sure to read the instruction labels on all cleaners to make sure they are used safely and appropriately.

## Advice for Teachers:

- If you observe children with open draining wounds or infections, refer the child to the school nurse.
- Enforce hand hygiene with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizers (if available) before eating and after using the bathroom.

## Advice for the School Health Professional:

- Students with skin infections may need to be referred to a licensed health care provider for diagnosis and treatment. Notify parents/guardians when possible skin infections are detected.
- Use standard precautions (hand hygiene before and after contact, wearing gloves) when caring for nonintact skin or potential infections.
- Use barriers such as gowns, masks, and eye protection if splashing body fluids is anticipated.

## Information adapted from CDC:

[http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar\\_mrsa\\_ca\\_public.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa_ca_public.html)

<http://www.cdc.gov/Features/MRSAinSchools/>

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