

MRSA, what parents, coaches, and athletes need to know

What is MRSA and where does it come from?

MRSA is a bacterium that is commonly found on the skin and/or the noses of healthy people. It is usually harmless at these sites, however can be dangerous if it enters the body through breaks in the skin, including micro-abrasions from shaving. Therefore abrasions, cuts, wounds, and surgical incisions may be sites for possible infections. MRSA infections may be mild, such as pimples or boils, or serious, including bone, joint, and bloodstream infections.¹ Staph infections commonly start as small, red, tender, pimple-like lesions and quickly progress. Such infections are dangerous because they are resistant to treatment with the antibiotics methicillin and flucloxacillin as well as other types.

Who is susceptible to MRSA?

Some people are at increased risk of developing infection. They include those with breaks in their skin due to wounds (including those caused by surgery), indwelling catheters, or burns, and those with immune system deficiencies. Football players and wrestlers are the most commonly affected athletes due to physical contact, skin damage, and sharing of equipment or clothing. "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. Examples of commonly shared items are towels, benches in saunas or hot tubs, and athletic equipment - in other words, anything that could have touched the skin of a staph infected person can carry the bacteria to the skin of another person."²

How can you prevent MRSA?

It is important to know the causes and risk factors for MRSA in order to prevent infection. The CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) has identified risk factors known as the five C's:

- Close skin-to-skin contact,
- Contaminated items (i.e. towels, razors, soap),
- Crowding,
- Cleanliness (i.e. poor hygiene), and
- Compromised skin integrity

To prevent infection, it is important to:

- Wash your hands before touching your eyes, mouth, nose, cuts or scrapes.
- Do not share towels, soap, or other personal care items. This includes towels used on the sidelines at games.
- Shower with soap and water as soon as possible after direct contact sports
- Wash towels, uniforms, scrimmage shirts and any other laundry in hot water and ordinary detergent and dry on the hottest cycle.

Soccer players should regularly clean their shinguards and avoid sharing them. Further, all wounds need to be cleaned and cared for properly. This includes washing with soap and water and covering the wound.

REFERENCES

1. Dr. Alan Johnson. "Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) infection," 8 Jan., 2005, <<http://www.netdoctor.co.uk/diseases/facts/mrsa.htm>> (11 Jan. 2006).
2. Minnesota Department of Health. "MRSA: Information for Coaches and Athletes," Nov. 2005, <<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/mrsa/mrsaathletes.pdf>> (11 Jan. 2006).