

MRSA Fact Sheet for Athletes and Coaches

Basic Information about MRSA

The emergence of antibiotic resistant bacteria has become a significant public health concern. Due to the extensive use of antibiotics, the sharing of antibiotics and/or the failure of the patient to complete a course of antibiotics, our current arsenal of antibiotics is becoming ineffective against common bacterial infections. Antibiotic resistant staph infections are labeled methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA). Fortunately, there are still different classes of antibiotics that can be used to control these infections, but resistance continues to spread to our newer drugs and threatens to exhaust our supply of effective treatments if practices are not put into place to stop irresponsible antibiotic use.

What are “staph” infections?

Staphylococcus aureus (commonly referred to as “staph”) is a bacteria that can live on human skin of even the cleanest individuals. It can cause boils, wound infections, abscesses, cellulitis, impetigo, pneumonia and even bloodstream infections. Usual symptoms of a skin infection are redness, warmth, swelling, tenderness and boils or blisters.

Who gets staph infections?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that 25%-35% of people in the United States have staph colonization—staph living on them, but not harming them. Staph likes to live in the nose, groin, around the anus, armpits, finger tips and wounds. Staph spreads by direct skin-to-skin contact with an infected individual or a colonized individual, or more rarely from objects contaminated by these individuals such as towels, toiletries, sports equipment, hot tubs and benches soiled with infected wound drainage. Factors related to a person’s health and exposure determines if one will actually develop an infection.

How can athletes avoid infection?

Good hygiene and hand washing practices are the best protection from all infectious diseases including MRSA. Washing your hands and body frequently after contact sporting events and training is important. Do not share personal items (towels, razors, athletic equipment, etc.) with others unless cleaned after use. Clean your clothes and equipment regularly. Avoid contact with individuals with draining wounds or suspected infections and their personal items.

What do I do if I think an athlete has a staph infection?

You should have the individual talk to a physician as soon as possible. Early treatment is key to prevent spread and serious harm. If antibiotics are prescribed, the person should finish the entire course--the last few pills kill the strongest germs.

Recommendations for athletes with MRSA infections:

1. Keep wounds covered. If wounds can not be covered during play, the player should not participate until the wound is completely healed in order to protect other players.
2. Shower and wash with soap and water regularly after practice, competition and training.
3. Do not share personal care items or equipment with other players.
4. Regularly clean all shared equipment with a commercial disinfectant or bleach solution.
5. Educate coaches and athletes on wound detection, infection recognition, first aid and proper care.
6. Encourage athletes to report wounds and infections and check for skin lesions regularly.
7. Always finish prescribed antibiotics and never share them.



Infectious Disease Epidemiology

Adapted from Minnesota Department of Health, Los Angeles Department of Health Services Public Health, Louisiana Office of Public Health, and the CDC