

CANTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS HEALTH SERVICES

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Dear Canton Public School athletes:

In Massachusetts and elsewhere throughout the country, MRSA (Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*) infections are becoming more common in community settings, including schools and among athletes. *Staphylococcus aureus* (“staph”) are bacteria commonly carried on the skin or in the nose of healthy people. About 25-30% of the U.S. population carries staph on their bodies at any time. MRSA is a kind of staph that is resistant to some kinds of antibiotics.

Staph infections, including MRSA, are spread by direct skin-to-skin contact, such as shaking hands, wrestling, or other direct contact with the skin of another person. Staph are also spread by contact with items that have been touched by people with staph, like towels shared after bathing and drying off, or shared athletic equipment in the gym, at a pool, or on the field.

Since MRSA are spread by direct contact (and on athletic teams), there are many opportunities for direct contact among athletes. Since 2002, school athletic teams in several states, including Massachusetts, have reported MRSA infections among wrestling, volleyball, swimming, gymnastics and most frequently, football teams. (Department of Public Health November 2007).

Most people who have MRSA on their skin do not have infections or illness caused by staph. These people are “colonized” with staph. Staph infections start when staph gets into a cut, scrape or other break in the skin. People who have skin infections should be very careful to avoid spreading their infection to others.

The symptoms of a MRSA infection and the symptoms of an infection due to other staph are the same. Pimples, rashes, pus-filled boils especially when warm, painful, red or swollen can indicate a staph skin infection. Staph can also cause more serious infection, such as severe skin infection, surgical wound infections, bloodstream infections and pneumonia. Symptoms could include high fever, swelling, heat and pain around a wound, headache, and fatigue.

How can MRSA infection among school athletes be prevented?

Practicing good hygiene is the best way to prevent getting and spreading MRSA infections and many other infections. All athletes should follow these guidelines:

- Shower with soap and water as soon as possible after direct contact sports, and use a clean, dry towel.
- Keep hands clean by washing them frequently with soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer gel.
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed.
- Avoid contact with other people’s wounds or bandages.
- Do not share towels (even on the sidelines at a game), soap, razors, or other personal care items.
- Do not share ointments or antibiotics.
- Wash towels, uniforms, scrimmage shirts, bathing suits and any other laundry in hot water and ordinary detergent, and dry on the hottest cycle after each use. Inform parents of these precautions if laundry is sent home (laundry must be in an impervious container or plastic bag for transporting home).
- Avoid whirlpools or common hot tubs, especially when having open wounds, scrapes, or scratches.
- Inform their coach or athletic trainer if they think they have a skin infection.