

# CANTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS HEALTH SERVICES

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Dear Parents and Guardians,

Health and education officials have reported that staph infections, including the antibiotic resistant strain known as Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA), have spread through schools, including Canton, in recent weeks. In school settings there are many opportunities for direct contact among students, especially those on athletic teams.

Staph is commonly found on the skin or in the nose of healthy, as well as ill persons. At any time, 25% - 30% of the population is carrying the staph bacteria, while about 1% of the population is carrying MRSA. Most people carry "staph" on their skin without symptoms or infection, but if it gets into cuts or abrasions of the skin, it may cause skin infections. These infections usually appear as pimples, boils or abscesses. The infection can be spread by skin-to-skin contact, or through sharing an item, like a towel or a piece of sports equipment, that has been used by an infected person, particularly one with an open wound.

Identifying a MRSA infection can be difficult because the symptoms of MRSA infection are similar to those of other skin infections. MRSA can only be diagnosed by culture and laboratory testing. The laboratory will also perform antibiotic susceptibility testing. Unfortunately, misdiagnosis or delayed diagnosis of MRSA infection can result in delayed treatment and more serious. If your child develops a sore or infection, which seems to get worse rather than heal, contact your physician for evaluation and inform the school nurse.

The first and most important line of prevention includes good hygiene:

- **PROPER HAND WASHING:** Reinforce hand washing using soap and water, or an alcohol-base hand sanitizer. Experts suggest that you wash your hands for as long as it takes to recite the alphabet.
- **COVER CUTS AND SCRAPES WITH A CLEAN BANDAGE:** This will help the wound heal. It will also prevent you from spreading bacteria to other people.
- **DO NOT TOUCH OTHER PEOPLE'S WOUNDS OR BANDAGES.**
- **DO NOT SHARE PERSONAL ITEMS:** If you use any shared gym equipment, wipe it down before and after you use it. Drying clothes, sheets and towels in a dryer, rather than letting them air dry, will help kill bacteria.

The importance of good personal hygiene cannot be over-emphasized. As the advent of the flu season is upon us, the precautions necessary to maintain good health should be reinforced with your children to safeguard them from such infections as MRSA and other diseases that are either transmitted through direct contact or are airborne.

Sincerely,

Janet Donnelly, RN, BSN  
Nurse Leader  
Canton Public Schools

Note: Data about MRSA and the school response was developed in consultation with the school medical advisor, the Town Board of Health, and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. Please refer to the following web sites for more information: