



Lake County

Health Department and
Community Health Center

To: Lake County school administration, nurses/health aides, PE staff and coaches

From: Communicable Disease Program

Date: 11/01/2007

Recommendations for the prevention of staphylococcal infection spread in schools

The recent media attention given to Methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) skin infections has created the perception that schools are high risk environments for contracting these infections. However, scientific data demonstrate that outbreaks of MRSA are uncommon in schools and those that have occurred have been limited primarily to contact sports participants such as football and wrestling team members. We appreciate and support your proactive efforts to address concerns about MRSA without causing unnecessary alarm and can inform you that, at this time, there are no reported outbreaks of MRSA in the Lake County community. We would also like to emphasize the following facts regarding MRSA.

- MRSA isn't new. It is an antibiotic-resistant form of staph that has been present in hospitals and other healthcare settings since the 1960s.
- During the 1990s it began spreading into the community primarily as the result of the widespread over use of antibiotics.
- About 25-30% of all people carry staphylococcal bacteria on their skin and their noses without being ill.
- Most MRSA infections are skin infections that appear as pustules, boils or resemble spider bites (red, swollen, painful, and have drainage) and commonly occur at the sites of visible skin trauma such as cuts and abrasions.
- Suspected staph infections should be evaluated by a healthcare provider as soon possible.
- MRSA bacteria are mainly spread by direct skin to skin contact; mostly from unclean hands or items contaminated by draining wounds.
- **THE BEST DEFENSE AGAINST MRSA IS GOOD PERSONAL HYGIENE. ESPECIALLY FREQUENT HAND WASHING, NOT SHARING PERSONAL HYGIENE ITEMS AND KEEPING SKIN LESIONS COVERED AND CLEAN.**
- **The environment is not as important a source of bacteria spread as person to person contact;** with the exception of common used personal items such as razors, towels and sports equipment (mats, weight lifting equipment and helmets).

- **MRSA bacteria are not difficult to kill in the environment. Special disinfectants or school closings are not necessary.**
- You can maintain a clean environment by establishing regular cleaning procedures for frequently touched surfaces and gym equipment using a 10 % bleach solution or your usual cleaning products.
- Sporadic MRSA cases occur frequently in the community and single cases in schools usually do not warrant the notification of students/parents.
- The decision to close a school for any communicable disease should be made by school officials in consultation with the Lake County Health Department.

Please place the enclosed prevention poster in a highly visible area to help educate your school's students and staff.

Feel free to contact the Communicable Disease program with questions or comments at 847-377-8130, or refer to www.co.lake.il.us/health