



Staphylococcus aureus, often called "staph" is a type of bacteria commonly found on the skin or in the nose of healthy people. Approximately 30% of people have staph in their noses and do not have any symptoms. MRSA which stands for **Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus Aureus*** is staph that is resistant to commonly used antibiotics such as penicillins and currently available cephalosporins. In the past, **MRSA** was found only in healthcare facilities and caused infection in people who were sick. More recently, MRSA has emerged in the community and can cause infections in otherwise healthy people.

Like other causes of skin infections in athletes, MRSA is usually spread from person to person through direct skin contact or contact with shared items or surfaces (e.g., towels, used bandages, weight-training equipment surfaces) that have touched a person's infection.

MRSA might spread more easily among athletes because they:

- have repeated skin-to-skin contact
- get breaks in the skin such as cuts and abrasions that if left uncovered allow staph and MRSA to enter and cause infection
- share items and surfaces that come into direct skin contact
- have difficulty staying clean

Skin infections including MRSA have been reported mostly in high-physical-contact sports such as wrestling, football, and rugby. However, MRSA infections have been reported among athletes in other sports such as soccer, basketball, field hockey, volleyball, rowing, martial arts, fencing, and baseball.

Even though little physical contact occurs in some sports during participation, skin contact or activities that may lead to spread of MRSA skin infections may take place before or after participation such as in the locker room. Therefore, anyone participating in organized or recreational sports should be aware of the signs of possible skin infections and follow prevention measures.

Following are NATA's guidelines for proper prevention of these and other communicable diseases that can be spread by athletic participation:

- Immediately shower after each practice or competition.
- Wash all athletic clothing worn during practice or competition daily.
- Clean and disinfect gym bags and/or travel bags, if the athlete is carrying dirty workout gear home to be washed and then bringing clean gear back to school in the same bag (note: this problem can also be prevented by using disposable bags for practice laundry).
- Wash athletic gear (such as knee or elbow pads) periodically and hang to dry.
- Clean and disinfect protective equipment such as helmets, shoulder pads, catcher's equipment and hockey goalie equipment on a regular basis.
- Do not share towels or personal hygiene products with others.
- All skin lesions should be covered before practice or competition to prevent risk of infection to the wound and transmission of illness to other participants; only skin infections that have been properly diagnosed and treated may be covered to allow participation of any kind.
- All new skin lesions occurring during practice or competition should be properly diagnosed and treated immediately.
- Playing fields should be inspected regularly for foreign objects and debris that could cause cuts or abrasions.
- Playing fields should be inspected regularly for animal droppings that could cause bacterial infections of cuts or abrasions.
- Athletic lockers should be sanitized between seasons.
- Rather than carpeting, locker or dressing rooms should have tile floors that can not only be cleaned, but also sanitized.
- Wrestling and gymnastics mats should be sanitized daily.
- Weight room equipment – including benches, bars and handles – should be cleaned and sanitized daily.

For more information refer to the following websites:

www.nata.org

www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_MRSA_AthletesFAQ.html