STAPH AND MRSA RECOGNITION AND PREVENTION

What is “Staph” *(Staphylococcus aureus)*?

*Staphylococcus aureus*, often referred to as “staph” is a common type of bacteria that can live harmlessly on the skin or in the nose of 25 to 35 percent of healthy people (this is often referred to as being “colonized” with the bacteria). Occasionally, staph can cause an infection. Staph bacteria are one of the most common causes of skin infection in the United States, but most of these infections are minor, causing pimples or boils and can be treated without antibiotics. However, staph bacteria can also cause serious infections such as pneumonia, bloodstream infections, and surgical wound infections.

What is MRSA *(methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus)*?

In the past, most serious staph bacterial infections were treated with a certain type of antibiotic related to penicillin called beta-lactams. Beta-lactam antibiotics include methicillin and other more common antibiotics such as oxacillin, penicillin, and amoxicillin. In recent years, treatment of these infections has become more difficult because staph bacteria have become resistant to antibiotics. These bacteria are called methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA). According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 1% of the population is colonized with MRSA. MRSA is one type of skin infection among several that are of concern in competitive and recreational sport environments.

Who gets “Staph”/MRSA?

“Staph” infections, including MRSA, have been traditionally associated with outbreaks in healthcare facilities, but they are becoming increasingly common among athletic facilities. Anyone who comes into contact with colonized individuals can contract the infection. “Staph” and MRSA are spread either by direct physical contact or indirect touching of contaminated objects. This includes touching, using, and/or sharing sheets, towels, clothes, equipment, athletic mats, personal items, bar soap, etc. which have been used by someone who has “staph” and/or MRSA, along with poor hygiene habits (e.g. hand washing, showering, etc).

What does “Staph”/MRSA look like?

“Staph” and/or MRSA usually first presents as some type of skin or soft tissue infection such as pimples, abscesses, pustules, and/or boils. Some can be red, swollen, painful, and/or have pus or other drainage. The pustules may be confused with insect bites initially, and may also be associated with existing abrasions and/or turf burns.

What to do.

Without proper referral and care, more serious infections may cause pneumonia, infection of the bloodstream, bone, and/or joints, and/or surgical wound infections. **If you or anyone you know has what appears to be “staph” and/or MRSA, please contact your athletic trainer, Student Health Center, or health care provider as soon as possible for evaluation.**
Prevention of “Staph”/MRSA

Although treatable, there can be complications associated with “staph” and MRSA infections, making prevention the best measure to combat these infections. The CDC suggests the following measures for preventing “staph” skin infections, including MRSA:

1. Practice good hand hygiene by washing hands frequently and in a thorough fashion with soap and warm water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
2. Take a shower with hot water and wash with soap (liquid antibacterial soap, not bar soap) following all activities which could put you at risk (team practice, class practice, strength training, conditioning sessions, etc.).
3. Avoid sharing towels, equipment, razors, soap (use liquid soap rather than bar soap), etc that come into contact with bare skin.
4. Use a barrier (e.g. clothing or a towel) between your skin and shared equipment.
5. Keep the environment clean; wipe surfaces of equipment that come into contact with bare skin before and after use.
6. Clean and properly cover any open wounds such as abrasions, lacerations, turf burns, etc. with an appropriate bandage at all times.
7. Avoid whirlpools, hydrotherapy pools, cold tubs, swimming pools, and other common tubs if you have an open wound.
8. Maintain clean facilities and equipment (more below).
9. Do not ignore skin infections, pimples, pustules, abscesses, etc. Report these to your health care provider immediately.

Additional Information

Additional information regarding “staph” and MRSA can be found at the following links:
- http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HEALTHINFO/DISCOND/Pages/MRSA.aspx

Clean Facilities and Equipment

Whirlpools, mats, and workout area floors on campus are cleaned with a hospital grade disinfectant such as Citricide. Mats at the SRC are cleaned twice/day using a solution of Citricide and clean water. An important factor is the use of clean mops.

At the Student Health Center Physical Therapy and Athletic Training Room, a disinfectant is added to the water in whirlpools between users and a second cleaning is done at the end of the day.