


RISK MANAGEMENT ALERT

Sure Schools



SCHOOL RISK MANAGEMENT ADVISORY
Utica National Insurance Loss Control Department Bulletin

Issue: 04-01 Date: 01-04

Topic: Preventing Skin Infections Among Student Athletes

BACKGROUND: Background: Although there are several categories of skin infections student athletes may be susceptible to, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recently issued a warning report regarding a potentially severe skin disorder caused by an antibiotic resistant strain of bacteria, (methicillin-resistant) staphylococcus aureus, or MRSA. According to the CDC, even though MRSA infections have historically been associated with health care institutions, there have been several reports in the past two to three years of clusters where MRSA infections have been transmitted among student athletes. Since the bacteria that cause typical “staph” infections are commonly carried on the skin or in the nose of healthy people, it is important to develop and implement an infection control program that includes preventive measures that may be taken to minimize the potential for MRSA infection and transmission among your student athletes.

According to the CDC, MRSA is resistant to the commonly used penicillin-related antibiotics used to treat typical staph infections. However, CDC does note that MRSA infections have been treated effectively with other antibiotics.

The CDC points out that there are several possible risk factors for MRSA infection that include: close physical contact (such as between athletes in football and wrestling), skin damage (abrasions, lesions or other uncovered cuts), sharing of equipment or towels and clothing particularly if one or more of your student athletes is infected or carrying MRSA (even without showing any symptoms).

Measures suggested by the CDC for the prevention of skin infections (in particular staphylococcal skin infections) include:

- Cover all wounds. If a wound cannot be covered adequately, consider excluding players with potentially infectious skin lesions from practice or competitions until the lesions are healed or can be covered adequately. (Remember that in some situations, bandaging wounds will not be effective due to athletes' sweat causing poor adhesion of the bandage. Always refer to specific sport rules with regard to the prohibition of an athlete to compete when that athlete has an infected wound.)
- Encourage good hygiene, including showering and washing with soap after all practices and competitions.
- Ensure availability of adequate soap and hot water.
- Discourage sharing of towels and personal items (e.g., clothing or equipment).
- Establish routine cleaning schedules for shared equipment. In some instances equipment may need to be sanitized on a daily basis.
- Train athletes and coaches in first aid for wounds and recognition of wounds that are potentially infected.
- Encourage athletes to report skin lesions to coaches and encourage coaches to assess athletes regularly for skin lesions. Suspicious wounds include those that ooze and are accompanied by redness and swelling. Any boils are suspect as well.

In addition to the above recommendations it is important that school shower, locker room facilities and wrestling mats are sanitized frequently. Student athletes should also be encouraged to use footwear designed for wear in public shower facilities.

For more information on MRSA and guidelines for preventing skin infections in your student athletes, visit these web sites:

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention www.cdc.gov

The National Federation of State High School Associations www.nfhs.org

The National Collegiate Athletic Association www.ncaa.org

