

Guidance for Schools and Student Athletes about Community-Associated Staphylococcus Aureus (CA-MRSA) Infections

Background

Staphylococcus aureus, often referred to as “staph,” are bacteria commonly found on the skin or in the nose of healthy people. Approximately 25% to 30% of the population are colonized with staph bacteria (i.e., carry the bacteria without becoming ill). Sometimes staph causes minor skin infections (e.g., pustules, small boils) that can be treated conservatively, without antibiotics. However, on occasion, staph bacteria can cause much more serious skin infections, as well as bloodstream infections, pneumonia, etc.

Over the past several years, treatment of some staph infections has become more problematic because the bacteria have become resistant to various antibiotics. Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) is a type of staph that is resistant to some antibiotics, including the antibiotic methicillin. Infections caused by MRSA have historically been associated with ill persons in health-care institutions. However, MRSA has now emerged as a common cause of skin and soft tissue infections that may occur in previously healthy adults and children who have not had prior contact with health-care settings. This type of MRSA infection is known as community-associated MRSA (CA-MRSA).

CA-MRSA can be transmitted from person to person through close contact. Risk factors associated with the spread of MRSA includes direct skin-to-skin contact with colonized or infected persons (non-intact skin serves as a point of entry for the bacteria), sharing contaminated personal items (e.g., towels, razors, soap, clothing), inadequate personal hygiene, direct contact with contaminated environmental surfaces, and living in crowded settings. CA-MRSA infections are treatable; early recognition and good medical management, including, as needed, surgical drainage and proper antibiotic prescribing and use, help to ensure prompt resolution of infections.

Recently, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) has received increasing reports of both outbreaks and sporadic cases of CA-MRSA infections. Likewise, there has been an increase in the number of outbreaks of CA-MRSA skin and soft-tissue infections reported at the national level. Outbreaks of CA-MRSA have occurred among athletes, especially participants in contact sports (e.g., football, wrestling) and sports where participants are prone to skin abrasions.

Recommendations

To limit the spread of staph, including MRSA, in school settings, IDPH recommends the following with respect to policy, infection control, and education/increased awareness: