

PRECAUTIONARY STEPS TO PROTECT AGAINST MRSA

In Montgomery County Public Schools, all school nurses have been asked to review proper hand washing and hygiene techniques at their respective schools. Additionally, we have reminded all custodians to use the appropriate disinfectant recommended by the health department to clean schools. All administrators have been asked to report any health concerns to the school district health coordinator in addition to their school nurse if any concerns arise.

The Virginia Department of Education sent information about MRSA to all school divisions in Virginia, and we are forwarding this information to our staff and families in order to keep them informed about precautionary measures that may be taken related to this illness.

Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus aureus Infections: MRSA Facts for Schools:

Staphylococcus aureus ("staph") infections have been around for a long time, causing mild to severe illness. MRSA is a kind of staph infection that may be more difficult to treat but is otherwise the same as a "staph infection." Mild infections may look like a pimple or boil and can be red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. More serious infections may cause pneumonia, bloodstream infections, or surgical wound infections. Staph is passed from person to person through direct contact with skin or through contact with contaminated items. The bacteria may live in people's noses and on their skin and most of the time do not cause any problem. Staph can enter the body through breaks in the skin and sometimes cause infection. The main ways to prevent staph infection are to wash hands and care for wounds properly.

Practical Advice for Teachers:

- Observe children for open wounds. If any are draining or contain pus, refer the child to the school nurse.
- Encourage hand washing before eating and after toileting.
- Coaches should ensure that athletes wash their hands, cover their wounds, and not share personal items and towels.

Practical Advice for Parents:

- Clean wounds and cover them with a clean, dry bandage. Wounds that do not heal properly need medical attention. The only way to determine if an infection is caused by MRSA is through laboratory testing ordered by a physician or other health care provider.
- Teach children to wash their hands regularly, such as before eating and after toileting. See <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/Epidemiology/Surveillance/Getsmart/documents/germposter.pdf> for a poster on hand washing.
- Be sure your family members use antibiotics properly. Take all that are prescribed, even if the symptoms stop before the prescription is used up. Do not share prescriptions.

- Children who participate in sporting events should wash their hands after each practice and game. They should not share equipment, uniforms, towels, or other personal items (e.g., razors). Wash uniforms and towels with hot water and detergent after each use.

Disinfection:

- In athletic rooms, mats, benches or other shared athletic equipment that might have skin contact should be disinfected after each game or practice.
- Contaminated surfaces may be cleaned using an EPA-registered cleaner or bleach solution (1 part bleach to 9 parts water).
- Routine cleaning is all that is recommended. Because the bacteria live on the skin, they may be reintroduced into any environment at any time. Therefore, hand washing and wound care remain the primary means of preventing staph infections.

Further information about MRSA may be found on the Virginia Department of Health website, www.vdh.virginia.gov.