



**DALLAS COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

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For Immediate Release – October 17, 2007

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DCHHS Raising Awareness of Ways to Prevent Community-Associated MRSA

October 17, 2007 (Dallas) - Dallas County Health and Human Services (DCHHS) is once again raising awareness of an emerging health threat in our community - Methicillin-resistant *S. aureus* or MRSA. MRSA is a type of bacterial infection that is resistant to common types of antibiotic medications. Typically, Community-Associated MRSA (CA-MRSA) infections occur as skin infections which are described as spider bites, pimples or boils. These infections have been occurring in otherwise healthy individuals including school-age children. DCHHS has investigated cases of CA-MRSA and has found facilities such as school locker rooms, jails, yoga centers, fitness centers, and nail salons to be sources of infection.

“For the past two years, Dallas County Health and Human Services has conducted active surveillance for MRSA in all area public schools” said Zachary Thompson, DCHHS Director. “This project has also been conducted in conjunction with the other neighboring counties of Denton, Tarrant, and Collin Counties. The purpose of the MRSA surveillance program is to collect vital information as to the prevalence of this disease and to help identify potential outbreaks early, in an effort to make schools safer against MRSA,” Thompson concluded.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports that athletes and children are among the groups who may be at higher risk of contracting MRSA. Factors that have been associated with the spread of CA-MRSA include: close skin-to-skin contact, openings in the skin such as cuts or abrasions, contact with contaminated items and surfaces, poor hygiene, and use of improperly sanitized whirlpools and ice baths.

“Currently, Staphylococcal infections are not notifiable conditions in Texas. Dallas County Health and Human Services receives and investigates self-reported cases of possible skin infections from teachers and students attending area schools, as well as from the general public,” said Dr. Wendy Chung, DCHHS Chief Epidemiologist. “Preventing and reducing MRSA infections in schools and the community involves implementing interventions to improve personal hygiene coupled with aggressive evaluation and treatment of people with soft tissue injuries and infections,” Chung concludes.

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Page 2 of 3 pages

DCHHS MRSA Recommendations

DCHHS offers the following recommendations to prevent the spread of MRSA:

- Keep wounds that are draining or have pus covered with clean, dry bandages
- Follow your healthcare provider's instructions on proper care of the wound.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially after changing the bandage or touching the infected wound.
- Do not share personal items and sharing personal items such as towels, washcloths, razors, clothing or uniforms.
- Talk to your doctor or healthcare providers who treat you that you have or had a staph. or MRSA skin infection.

Athletes, athletic personnel, and parents can help prevent and control MRSA infections within the schools and athletic setting by following simple health and hygiene practices. In addition, athletes who participate in sports involving direct physical contact (e.g. wrestling and football) and athletes participating in sports that do not involve direct physical contact, but who share workout areas should follow these health and hygiene practices listed below to help prevent and control MRSA within the athletic setting:

1. Wash hands frequently with soap and water, especially after using any sports facilities.
2. Avoid sharing personal items (e.g., towels, washcloths, razors, clothing, or uniforms) that may have had contact with and infected individual or potentially infectious material.
3. Report any suspicious skin sore or boil to your healthcare provider and school nurse immediately.
4. If you participate in sports involving close personal contact (e.g. wrestling and football) shower with soap immediately after each practice, game, or match.
5. Non-washable gear (e.g. head protectors), should be wiped down with alcohol after each use.
6. Athletic equipment such as wrestling or gymnastics mats should be wiped down regularly with an antibacterial solution
7. Athletes involved in close contact sports should receive a total body check by the appropriate athletic personnel prior to any game, match or tournament.
8. Individuals with an infection involving drainage (e.g. pus drainage), who are involved in close contact sports, should be excluded from participation in sporting events and practices until no pus drainage is present and the infected site can be adequately covered with a bandage and clothing.
9. Any cut or break in the skin should be washed with soap and water and a clean, dry dressing applied on a daily basis, before and after participation in close contact sports, and after using any sports facilities.

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Page 3 of 3 pages

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DCHHS MRSA Recommendations

10. Tell your healthcare provider (e.g. primary care doctor or school nurse) and the appropriate athletic personnel if you currently have or have had a history of an antibiotic-resistant *Staph.* skin infection(s).

There are many steps that you can take to prevent the spread of CA-MRSA. DCHHS has developed guidelines for preventing the spread of CA-MRSA, as well as public education materials for the public's use. A copy of the DCHHS guidelines and educational materials may be downloaded from <http://www.dallascounty.org/department/hhservices/MRSA.html>. If you have any questions, or to report a suspected case of MRSA, please call (214) 819-1928. Working together, we can effectively address this emerging health threat.