

**METHICILLIN-RESISTANT STAPHYLOCOCCUS AUREUS
(MRSA)
SCHOOL GUIDELINES**

(Excerpts from the Florida School Health Administrative Guidelines and CDC Website)

DESCRIPTION:

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) is a type of staph that is resistant to certain antibiotics. These antibiotics include methicillin and other more common antibiotics such as oxacillin, penicillin and amoxicillin. Staph infections, including MRSA, occur most frequently among persons in hospitals and healthcare facilities (such as nursing homes and dialysis centers) who have weakened immune systems.

MRSA infections that are acquired by persons who have not been recently (within the past year) hospitalized or had a medical procedure (such as dialysis, surgery, catheters) are known as CA-MRSA (community associated) infections. Staph or MRSA infections in the community are usually manifested as skin infections, such as pimples and boils, and occur in otherwise healthy people. MRSA often appears as a purplish or deep red swollen area on the skin, with or without drainage.

HOW TRANSMITTED:

Risk factors associated with the spread of MRSA include direct skin-to-skin contact with infected persons (non-intact skin serves as a point of entry for the bacteria), sharing contaminated personal items (e.g., body towels, razors, soap, and clothing), poor personal hygiene, direct contact with contaminated environmental surfaces, and living in crowded settings. Athletes who shave body areas to increase competitiveness will experience an increased risk of MRSA due to inevitable razor nicks.

School wrestling teams or other groups participating in contact sports are at an increased risk. It is important for coaches to be aware that a skin lesion may be MRSA, to clean all equipment with a disinfectant solution, and to report suspected skin lesions to the parent and school nurse. Athletes with active MRSA infections should be exempt from team play until treatment clears the infection.

TREATMENT:

Treatment for MRSA may include taking an antibiotic, and may include having a doctor drain the lesion.

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE RECOMMENDATION:

Students with MRSA may attend school. Any draining lesion must be covered completely during school hours.

Students are not normally excluded from school for a MRSA infection. They may, however, be prevented from participating in activities that would increase the chance for spreading the infection. This would primarily be physical education and sports. Please discuss these situations with your school nurse or the supervisor of Health Services.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES:

- Encourage frequent hand washing or use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers
- Encourage good personal hygiene practices through educational programs
- Avoid crowded conditions
- Keep open wounds such as cuts or scrapes covered with bandages
- Avoid touching other people's cuts or bandages
- Frequent cleaning of environmental surfaces
- If a cluster of three or more cases occur in a single classroom or athletic team, please notify the School Health Services Office who will contact the health department.

SHOULD THE ENTIRE SCHOOL COMMUNITY BE NOTIFIED OF EVERY MRSA INFECTION?

Usually, it should not be necessary to inform the entire school community about a single MRSA infection. When a MRSA infection occurs within the school population, the school nurse or physician should determine, based on their medical judgment, whether some or all students, parents and staff should be notified. Consultation with the School Health Services Office should be used to guide this decision.

Remember that staphylococcus (staph) bacteria, including MRSA, have been and remain a common cause of skin infections.

PARENT NOTIFICATION:

Should it be determined necessary to notify parents the following letter and 2-page informational Questions and Answers Fact Sheet will be recommended to be sent home.

INSTRUCTIONS: This form should be sent to parents of all children in the class where an outbreak has been confirmed.

Letterhead

Date

RE: Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* Infections (MRSA)

Dear Parent/Guardian:

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information regarding *Staphylococcus aureus* “staph”. Although staph infections have been around for many years, Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) is a type of staph that is resistant to certain antibiotics. In the past, MRSA has been found in healthcare setting; however, MRSA is now commonly found in community settings such as daycare centers, schools, and fitness centers. In the community, most MRSA infections are skin infections.

Frequent hand washing is the single most preventative measure to avoid infection. Lather yours hands with plain soap and water—using adequate friction for up to 20 seconds: before handling food, eating, after using the bathroom, blowing your nose, coughing, sneezing and after handling animals, blood or other body fluids. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers do not replace soap and water hand washing, but hand sanitizers or hand-hygiene wipes may be used when soap and water are not accessible.

Hand sanitizers contain alcohol making them a fire hazard; therefore the use of alcohol-based sanitizers on a daily basis is not recommended by the Department of Education nor should they be stored in sizeable quantities in accordance with the Florida Fire Prevention Code. Furthermore, without appropriate supervision of these products, misuse may occur.

To assist parents and school officials, the Centers for Disease and Prevention (CDC) Web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/MRSAinSchools/> provides answers to commonly asked questions about how to protect students and staff from MRSA skin infections. The above CDC Web site includes practical advice for teachers as well as additional information and resources.

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Parent/Guardian

RE: Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* Infections (MRSA)

In accordance with Chapter 64E-13, School Sanitation Rule, the Florida Department of Health (DOH) inspects all Florida schools twice a year. These biannual on-site inspections are conducted to ensure:

- Athletic and recreational equipment and facilities are clean and in safe condition;
- Buildings are kept clean and in good repair; and
- Toilet rooms have appropriate hand washing facilities with soap dispensers at each washbasin.

For local information concerning MRSA, please contact the Duval County Health Department at 253-1000 or the School Health Services Office at 253-1580.

The attached information on MRSA is being sent to you in a Questions and Answers format. We are hopeful this will provide you with some additional information.

Attachment: 1

METHICILLIN-RESISTANT STAPHYLOCOCCUS AUREUS (MRSA)

Questions and Answers

What is MRSA?

Staphylococcus aureus is a type of bacteria commonly found on the skin or in the nose of healthy individuals. Some *Staphylococcus aureus* is resistant to certain antibiotics, which makes it more difficult to treat than a normal Staph infection. The name methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, or MRSA, is used for the drug resistant strain of the bacteria.

How common is MRSA?

Staphylococcus aureus bacteria is one of the most common causes of skin infections in the United States. The occurrence of MRSA infections is on the rise in Florida and nationwide. In response to this increase, the Florida Department of Health investigates potential outbreaks of MRSA infections and provides education to the public and healthcare community.

How is MRSA spread?

MRSA is most commonly spread among individuals having close physical contact with an infected person, although a person can have MRSA on their skin, show no sign of illness, and still spread the bacteria. An individual can also become infected by touching objects contaminated with MRSA. Objects such as towels, sheets, wound dressings, clothes, and razors can become contaminated from the skin of an infected individual. MRSA is not spread through the air. Contaminated hands play a significant role in spreading the bacteria, either direct person to person or indirectly by contaminating objects.

What are the symptoms of a MRSA infection?

MRSA infections are typically minor infections of the skin and can be treated effectively with appropriate skin care and antibiotics to which the organism is susceptible as determined by laboratory testing. MRSA infections can begin as a small pimple/boil, which may progress to a large pus-filled carbuncle. The carbuncles/boils can spread to other sites on the body if left untreated. Severe disease or death is not common, especially if the infection is treated quickly and appropriately.

How will I know if I have a MRSA infection?

A laboratory test is necessary to determine if an individual is infected with MRSA. Typically, the infection is drained and a sample of the fluid/pus from the infection is tested by a laboratory.

What can I do to prevent MRSA in myself and keep from spreading a MRSA infection to others?

- Wounds and breaks in the skin should be washed clean with soap and water as soon as possible, and kept clean. Waterless hand sanitizers containing alcohol are also effective.
- Follow your healthcare provider's instructions for treatment. Antibiotics need to be taken according to directions and only according to directions. When antibiotics are prescribed, they should be taken to completion, even if the wound is healing. Also, do not self-medicate with leftover antibiotics.
- Keep all infections, especially those that are draining or are pus-filled, covered with clean, dry bandages.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water. Individuals who may change your bandages should also wash their hands with soap and warm water. Alcohol based hand hygiene products are also good. These products are readily available in stores and can be carried in you pocket or purse.
- Avoid sharing personal items, including towels, clothes, bedding, other linens and razors.
- Wash linens and clothes with hot water and laundry detergent. Dry clothes in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, this will help kill the bacteria.
- Do not lance/cut open any skin infection/boil yourself, as this could cause further infection. Drainage and good wound care may be all that is needed to allow an infection to heal on its own, but a medical provider should be consulted for any skin infection or boil that appears to require incision and draining.

Who can I call for additional information about MRSA?

For more information call the School Health Office at 253-1580 or the Duval County Health Department at 253-1000 or consult the [CDC.gov](http://www.CDC.gov) Website for more information.

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- MRSA is primarily transmitted person to person through close contact.
- Rates of MRSA are lowest in school-age children, compared to persons of all other ages.
- There is no current epidemic in Florida of Staph infections in general, nor of MRSA, as judged by hospitalization and mortality data.
- As stated in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) article 85% of the MRSA infections are in people who have had contact with a healthcare facility and only 15% are in people that have not been sick recently.
- Many people can carry the MRSA bacteria without knowing it. Focusing on individuals with an infection is not sufficient to address the problem and halt transmission.
- Transmission of MRSA can occur both within and outside of the school setting. MRSA is a community problem and not confined to the school setting.
- MRSA infections are not new. The county health departments and school health nurses have been working with this problem for several years.
- The typical classroom environment is not a high risk environment for the transmission of MRSA. Sports, where there is a lot of physical contact, potential for skin abrasions and cuts, and sharing of equipment between players, are where transmission can occur. Sharing of towels, uniforms, razors and other equipment should be avoided. Routine cleaning of locker rooms and sports equipment with a disinfectant is recommended.
- MRSA has been reported from a number of schools in Florida. While it is mainly found in sports teams, especially football teams, anyone can get MRSA.
- School staff should review education about MRSA and other infections and know when to refer a student for health screening or medical care. The School Health Office can assist you as well as your school nurse or the Duval County Epidemiology Department regarding prevention, referral, treatment and public education related to MRSA.

MRSA WEB SITES:

MRSA in Schools

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Questions and Answers about Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) in Schools

<http://www.cdc.gov/Features/MRSAinSchools/>

The EPA provides a list of EPA-registered products effective against MRSA:

<http://epa.gov/oppad001/chemregindex.htm>

MRSA in Athletics

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5233a4.htm>

General MRSA

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Community Acquired-MRSA

http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa_ca.html

http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa_ca_public.html

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5205a4.htm>