



**CABINET FOR HEALTH AND FAMILY SERVICES  
DEPARTMENT FOR PUBLIC HEALTH**

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**Janie Miller**  
Secretary

**Letter for Environmental and Infection Control of Skin Infections**

**To Whom It May Concern:**

Recently, there has been elevated public awareness of skin infections specifically, *Staphylococcus aureus* "Staph" infections, as a result of nationwide media attention. Staph is commonly carried on the skin or in the nose of healthy people and is spread by close contact with infected people. Staph can also come off infected skin onto shared objects and surfaces and then transfer onto the skin of another person who uses the object or surface. It can potentially lead to a skin infection in certain instances. The involved site can be red, swollen, painful and draining and may appear as an infected cut, boil, fluid-filled blister (impetigo), or skin sore that look like infected insect bites. More serious infections, such as surgical wound infections, bloodstream infections and pneumonia, can also occur. When Staph becomes resistant to a specific antibiotic, like Methicillin, the antibiotic may no longer cure the infection; thus this strain of Staph is called Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA). Although Methicillin may no longer be useful, other antibiotics can be used to treat MRSA infections; however, sometimes the treatment may be more expensive and/or take longer.

In light of this increased public concern and our desire to improve the health of our citizens, the Cabinet of Health and Family Services, Department for Public Health has developed guidelines to assist you in educating parents, students and citizens regarding MRSA infections and steps that can be taken to prevent them.

Attached are two sets of guidelines, a General Guidance for all school and similar environments and Guidance for Athletic Departments. These guidelines are also useful in helping control many other communicable diseases, not just MRSA.

The Department for Public Health supports your goal of having a safe environment and hopes that the tools provided with this letter will help minimize or prevent the occurrence of illnesses.

William D. Hacker, MD, FAAP, CPE  
Acting Undersecretary for Health;  
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Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services  
Department for Public Health

*Guidelines to Help Prevent the Spread of Skin Infections*

PUBLIC HEALTH CLEANING GUIDELINES

**GENERAL GUIDANCE:**

*The most effective means of controlling the spread of viruses and bacteria (germs) in the environment is frequent, thorough and effective hand hygiene.*

Schools should implement protocols to emphasize hand hygiene among students and staff by encouraging them to:

- Wash hands frequently!
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available and hands do not look dirty. (Soil and other debris on the hands can diminish its effectiveness to kill germs.)

Students and staff with any skin problems should be reported to the school nurse, coach, or a health care provider. Individuals with skin lesions, sores or rashes should cover the entire wound with a secure water-proof bandage, particularly if the wound is draining. The bandage should be kept clean and dry. If the bandage becomes wet or soiled it should be replaced.

Dispose of bandages and tissues in the regular trash but to prevent others from coming in contact with this garbage, make sure to use a zippered bag or tie securely in a plastic bag.

In addition, as part of routine custodial practices, cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces in the school is essential to keeping the environment healthy. Clean all hard surfaces frequently with particular attention to commonly touched areas;

- Doorknobs
- Light switches
- Table tops
- Desks
- Floors
- Lockers

Detergent-based cleaners should be used to initially clean dirt and debris from surfaces followed by Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered disinfectants to remove germs from the environment. Disinfectants are readily available at stores but make sure that the label indicates it is a disinfectant and follow the label instructions.

Germs must be in contact with wet disinfectant for a long enough period of time to be killed: allow the surface to air dry, it is best not to rinse or wipe the object or surface right away in order to allow the disinfectant to be in contact for the correct time.

- It is important to read the instruction labels on all disinfectants to make sure they are used safely and appropriately. Environmental cleaners and disinfectants should not be used to treat infections.
- The EPA provides a list of EPA-registered products effective against MRSA: <http://epa.gov/oppad001/chemregindex.htm>
- A 5-6% sodium hypochlorite (household) bleach solution is an easy way to make an appropriate disinfectant: mix one tablespoon of bleach into one quart of water. It can be used in a spray bottle, as a soaking solution or applied directly by mops for larger surfaces. For effective disinfection, the solution must be in contact with a surface for a minimum of 2 minutes. Mix a fresh solution every day, leftover solution should be discarded at the end of the day and never mix bleach with any other household chemicals or products containing ammonia. Mixing these chemicals with bleach will produce hazardous gases.
- Cleaners and disinfectants can be irritating and have been associated with health problems such as asthma. Therefore, it is important to read the instruction labels on all cleaning products to make sure they are used safely and appropriately - with disinfection, more is not better. For suggestions on implementing a "green cleaning program" please refer to Hospitals for a Healthy Environment (H2E) 10 Step Guide to Green Cleaning Implementation: <http://www.h2e-online.org/docs/h2e10stepgreenclean-r5.pdf>

**Here are some answers to commonly asked questions:**

**Should schools close because of an MRSA infection?**

Not Typically. Only in rare cases will it be necessary to close schools because of an MRSA infection in a student.

The decision to close a school for any communicable disease should be made by school officials in consultation with local and/or state public health officials. However, in most cases, it is not necessary to close schools because of an MRSA infection in a student. It is important to note that MRSA transmission can be prevented by simple measures such as hand hygiene and covering infections.

**Should the school be closed to be cleaned or disinfected when an MRSA infection occurs?**

Not Typically. Only in rare cases will it be necessary to close schools to "disinfect" them when MRSA infections occur.

Covering infected skin lesions and rashes will greatly reduce the risks of surfaces becoming contaminated with MRSA. In general it is not necessary to close schools to "disinfect" them when MRSA infections occur. MRSA skin infections are transmitted primarily by skin-to-skin contact and from contact with surfaces that have come into contact with someone else's infection.

When MRSA skin infections occur, cleaning and disinfection should be performed on surfaces that are likely to contact uncovered or poorly covered infections.

## GUIDANCE FOR ATHLETIC DEPARTMENTS:

### Encourage athletes to:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizing gel if hands do not look dirty and soap and water are not available.
- Shower with soap and water as soon as possible after direct contact sports, and use a clean, dry towel.
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a clean, dry bandage until healed.
- Avoid contact with other people's lesions or bandages.
- Do not share towels (even on the sidelines at a game), water bottles, soap, razors, or other personal care items.
- Do not share ointments or antibiotics.
- Wash towels, uniforms, scrimmage shirts, and any other laundry in hot water and ordinary detergent immediately after each practice or game and dry on the hottest cycle
- Inform parents of these precautions if laundry is sent home (laundry must be in an impervious container or plastic bag for transporting home).
- Avoid whirlpools or common hot tubs, especially when having open wounds, scrapes, or scratches.
- Students should inform their coach or athletic trainer if they think they have a lesion, sore or rash on the skin.
- An athlete should be referred to a health care provider:
  - If there are concerns over any lesion, sore, or rash on the skin, especially those that are red, swollen, or draining fluid.
  - If the athlete has other signs of illness such as fever or vomiting.
  - Multiple athletes have similar symptoms.
- An athlete may be excluded from competition or practice if there is concern regarding a lesion, sore, or rash until evaluated by a health care provider. Additionally, an athlete should be excluded from competition if the evaluating health provider deems it appropriate.
- All skin lesions, sores or rashes should be covered by a clean, dry bandage when participating in practice or competition. If lesions cannot be covered completely, or if drainage (or "pus") is wetting the bandage or seeping out between the bandage and skin, athletes should be excluded from competition until the lesion can be safely and completely covered.
- If an athlete with skin lesions is participating in a sport that requires frequent skin-to-skin contact (e.g., wrestling), then consideration should be given to excluding that athlete from participation until the lesion is fully healed, since maintaining the bandage in place may be difficult.
- An athlete may return to competition or practice after consulting with the athlete's health care provider, coach, and specific sports league rules.

**Procedures for cleaning athletic area and equipment should be established and staff and athletes must be educated about these procedures:**

- Make sure equipment is in good working condition without rips, tears or other damage. Replace items rather than using tape to repair damaged areas since the tape may interfere with the disinfectant process.
- Clean the athletic area and sports equipment routinely—at least weekly—using EPA-registered disinfectant or a fresh (mixed daily) household bleach solution (1 tablespoon bleach to 1 quart of water) after practices / matches. Please refer to the manufacturer's directions for recommended contact times for the various disinfectants. Household bleach solutions must be in contact for a minimum of 2 minutes.
- Clean mats and other high-use equipment before each practice and several times a day throughout a tournament, using an EPA-registered disinfectant or a fresh (mixed daily) household bleach solution.
- Locker rooms, including any shower areas should be cleaned daily, if used.
- If soap is furnished, it should be accessible from a wall dispenser
- Ensure that athletic areas, locker rooms and restrooms all have separate cleaning mops and buckets, and that all mops (washable micro-fiber heads or disposable mop cloths preferred) and buckets are cleaned regularly.

**Wrestling Room and Mats:**

- Wipe down padding along walls, benches and door pulls/knobs with an EPA-registered disinfectant or a fresh (mixed daily) household bleach solution after practices / matches. Please refer to the manufacturer's directions for recommended contact times for the various disinfectants. Household bleach solutions must be in contact for a minimum of 2 minutes.
- Clean floors after mats are stored and before mats are used again.
- Use "dedicated" mops to clean athletic areas and wash mop heads on a regular basis. May use disposable mop cloths that are discarded after each use
- Clean and disinfect mats before and after practice and matches. All sides of mats should be cleaned before they are rolled up.
- Use "dedicated" mop heads for mat surfaces. Wash these mop heads on a regular basis.

**Weight Room:**

- Wipe down grips on weights and lifting belts at least daily.
- Clean floors, benches, supports, pads, light switches and door pulls/knobs daily.

**Sports Equipment:**

- Schedule regular cleaning and disinfection for sports equipment: balls (football, basketballs, baseballs, softballs, volley balls, soccer balls), racket grips, bats, etc...
- Avoid using tape to wrap gripping areas of rackets, bar bells etc... as this may provide an environment for germs to thrive.
- Clean and disinfect sports equipment that comes in direct contact with the skin of players, such as wrestling headgear, football helmets, gloves, and pads.

**For more detailed information, please refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**

**CA-MRSA Information for the Public**

[http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar\\_mrsa\\_ca.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa_ca.html)

**NIOSH Safety and Health Topic: MRSA and the Workplace**

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/mrsa/>

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