



NORTHWEST GEORGIA PUBLIC HEALTH

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Dear Parents, Guardians and Caretakers:

Recently, public health officials have observed an increase in requests for information from school system officials and parents concerning bacterial infections caused by an antibiotic-resistant strain of the bacteria *Staphylococcus aureus*, often referred to simply as “resistant staph” or MRSA. This letter is being sent to give you more information about staph infections.

Staph bacteria are commonly present on the skin or in the noses of healthy people. Most people with staph bacteria in the nose or on intact skin do not get sick. Staph bacteria are one of the most common causes of skin infection in the United States. Most of these skin infections are minor and can be treated without antibiotics. However, staph bacteria can sometimes cause severe skin and soft tissue infections. If not promptly treated, severe infections with staph bacteria can lead to pneumonia and sometimes infection in the blood stream or bones. Public health officials and physicians have observed that severe infections with antibiotic-resistant staph bacteria are being seen more often in community groups such as athletic teams, work places, schools, child care centers and facilities such as jails, prisons or youth detention centers. In the past, antibiotic-resistant cases of staph were mostly seen in residents of nursing homes or in hospital patients.

The following steps will help to prevent skin and soft tissue infections and control the spread of infection to others:

- **Keep hands clean.** Hand hygiene is the most important prevention measure. Help children to clean their hands regularly. If there is visible dirt or debris, use liquid soap and water. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are also recommended to kill bacteria on hands when there is no visible soil.
- **Learn to recognize the signs of skin and soft tissue infection.** Observe the skin for any sign of infected wounds, pimples, or boils. If you notice signs of skin infection such as a hardened area under the skin, redness or drainage from a wound, pimple, or boil, go to the doctor.
- **Cover cuts, scrapes, wounds, pimples or boils.** Keep cuts and scrapes covered to prevent bacteria from entering. Keep wounds that are draining or have pus covered with clean, dry bandages. Follow your doctor’s instructions on proper care of the wound. Do not touch wounds, pimples or boils. Pus from infected wounds can spread infection to others. Always wash your hands carefully before and after changing a bandage. Bandages can be discarded with the regular trash.
- **Personal items should not be shared.** Use disposable hand towels for drying hands. Personal items such as towels, washcloths, clothes, uniforms, razors and bedding should not be shared. Wash soiled items with water and laundry detergent. Drying clothing and linens in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, also helps to kill bacteria.
- **Follow your doctor’s instructions.** Your doctor will prescribe antibiotics only when necessary. Always take antibiotics exactly as ordered for the full number of days prescribed. Follow the doctor’s advice for care of the infected area, and be sure to keep any follow-up appointments. Contact your doctor if the infected area doesn’t improve, gets worse or if other signs/symptoms of illness are noticed. Persons with draining wounds or infected areas should stay at home until the doctor releases them to return to school, child care centers or work.
- **Athletes should immediately report signs of skin or soft tissue infection to their parents and coach.** Coaches may exclude student athletes from participation and may require them to obtain approval from their doctor before resuming participation in sports activities. To prevent infection, athletes should shower as soon as possible after contact sports, always use a clean towel and change into clean clothing. Scrimmage and game clothing should be washed after wearing with detergent and water and dried in a hot dryer.
- **Toys, sports equipment, mats and all shared items should be regularly cleaned and disinfected.**

Additional information about staph infections is available at <http://www.health.state.ga.us/mrsa> and www.cdc.gov/Features/MRSAinSchools and from your physician or local county health department.

Sincerely,

C. Wade Sellers, M.D., M.P.H.
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