

August 2008

Dear Parents/Guardians:

Staph infections, including Community-Acquired Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (CA-MRSA), are often a topic in the local and national news. Understandably, we remain concerned about the impact staph infections could have on our schools. We want to share accurate information about this common skin infection and what the Fulton County School System is doing to protect our students and eliminate its possible spread. We also ask for your commitment to the guidelines outlined in this letter. We believe healthy children learn better and have fewer missed days in schools.

Although news reports can be alarming, staph infections are common and in most cases, very treatable with antibiotics. As you will read in the Q&A document, staph is among the most common causes of skin infections in the United States. A more serious strain of the bacteria is called Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) and is more difficult, but not impossible, to treat with antibiotics. Community-Acquired Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (CA-MRSA) is a term used to describe the mode of transmission – that MRSA can be acquired in community or public settings where close, personal contact occurs.

MRSA infections can occur in any person, at any age. Those who are immunocompromised because of chronic illness or who spend extended time in a healthcare facility are considered at greater risk. Athletes also are susceptible because of physical contact during sports activities. As a result, Fulton County High School Athletic Departments, in collaboration with the school system's Office of Student Health Services, have implemented new guidelines. Based on Centers for Disease Control and Fulton County Department of Health and Wellness recommendations, these guidelines have become a condition for participating in any athletic activity or event. **Parents and students are expected to ensure these guidelines are followed and enforced. Failure to do so could result in denial of participation.**

Guidelines for MRSA Prevention

- Showering and washing with soap and water immediately after practice, competition and training.
- Not sharing personal care items such as soap, towels and razors, uniforms, and sports equipment that directly touch the body.
- Taking home practice clothes, towels, and other linens on a daily basis and returning clean practice clothes back to school.
- Washing practice clothes, uniforms and other sports-related linens in hot water and laundry detergent. Using a hot dryer, rather than air drying, also helps kill bacteria.
- Wiping down athletic equipment and materials with sanitizer regularly.
- Notifying coaches, athletic trainers and the school's clinic staff of any wounds that are potentially infected.
- Keeping all wounds clean and covered and avoiding contact with others' open wounds, or anything that could possibly be contaminated by infection (boils, blisters, etc).
- Washing hands frequently with soap and water, especially after practice, competition and training.

The best defense against the spread of infections like MRSA, the flu and other communicable diseases is good hand washing and proper hygiene. Washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and/or cleaning them with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer reduce the chances of spreading infections and illnesses. Please encourage your student to wash his/her hands regularly.

In particular, our Middle and High School Athletic Departments and Facilities Management work diligently to address cleanliness and infection control issues. In addition, this year Student Health Services will collaborate with Dr. Lilly Immergluck, Pediatric Infectious Disease Specialist with Children's Healthcare of Atlanta. By everyone working together, we can effectively prevent and control the spread of serious infections and illnesses.

Please call your school clinic or the Fulton County Schools' Office of Student Health Services at 404-305-2177 if you have questions. More information can be found on the Centers for Disease Control web site at www.cdc.gov/features/MRSAinSchools.

Sincerely,

Lynne P. Meadows, RN, MS
Coordinator
Office of Student Health Services