

## What is MRSA?

MRSA is a type of staph bacterium that can resist the effects of many common antibiotics. This ability makes MRSA infections much more difficult to cure. Community Associated MRSA (CA-MRSA) is an infection that affects the skin of otherwise healthy individuals such as student athletes.

## What does an MRSA infection look like?

An MRSA skin infection looks like a boil, a pimple or a spider bite that may be:

- Red
- Swollen
- Painful
- Oozing pus

These infections most commonly occur at sites where the skin has been broken by cuts or scrapes, or on areas of the skin covered by hair, such as the:

- Back of the neck
- Groin
- Buttock
- Armpit
- Beard area on men

## How does MRSA spread?

MRSA is spread by:

- **Skin-to-skin contact.** MRSA can be transmitted from one person to another by skin-to-skin contact. While MRSA skin infections can occur in participants of many types of sports, they're much more likely to occur in contact sports such as football, wrestling and rugby.
- **Touching contaminated objects.** If drainage from a MRSA skin infection comes into contact with an object like a towel, weight-training equipment or a shared jar of ointment. The next person who touches that object may become infected with MRSA bacteria.

## What can schools do to prevent MRSA infections?

Athletic equipment such as wrestling mats, weight-training equipment and locker room benches should be regularly cleaned and disinfected. There's no evidence that spraying or fogging rooms or surfaces with disinfectant works any better than just focusing on frequently touched surfaces.

## What can athletes do to prevent MRSA infections?

To help prevent the spread of MRSA infections:

- **Wash your hands.** Use soap and water or an alcohol-based sanitizer. Clean your hands before and after playing sports, using shared weight-training equipment and changing a bandage on a wound.
- **Take showers.** Shower immediately after exercise. Don't share items that touch your bare skin such as bar soap, razors or towels.
- **Use barriers.** Cover cuts and scrapes with a bandage to keep germs out. Lay a towel down to act as a barrier between your skin and benches in locker rooms.
- **Wash towels, practice clothes and competition singlet.** Wash all items after each use. Wash in hot water and dry completely in a hot dryer.

## If you suspect an MRSA infection, what should you do?

Don't try to treat the infection yourself. Go to your doctor. Minor MRSA skin infections usually heal fine after being drained. If the infection doesn't heal well or gets worse, your doctor may prescribe antibiotics that are still effective against MRSA. If the infection is severe, you may need to be hospitalized. In rare cases, MRSA infections can become life-threatening.

## When can the athlete return to play?

The National Athletic Trainers' Association recommends that suspicious lesions be tested for MRSA and that the athlete not be allowed to return to play until:

- The athlete has taken an appropriate antibiotic for at least 72 hours
- Drainage from the wound has stopped
- No new lesions have developed in the past 48 hours