



**Community Health Services**

**Phone** (607) 274-6604

**Fax** (607) 274-6620

401 Dates Drive  
Ithaca, NY 14850

October 22, 2007

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Cases of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) may occur in the schools in Tompkins County. The Tompkins County Health Department (TCHD) works with any involved schools to minimize any risk to children and to school employees. Because of the wide-spread attention to MRSA in the media recently, school superintendents and the TCHD feel that it is important that all families be provided with the same information about the infection and about measures to take to prevent this infection.

*Staphylococcus aureus* (aka staph) is a bacterium that frequently causes skin infections. MRSA is a strain of staph that is resistant to certain antibiotics. MRSA was identified more than 40 years ago and has been increasing in frequency around the country.

Staph infections are usually spread from person to person by close skin-to-skin contact, usually through contaminated hands. Community-acquired MRSA (CA-MRSA) most commonly causes skin infections (pimple, boil, or pustule) but can sometimes also cause more significant soft tissue infections (furuncle or cellulites). If medical treatment is indicated and an appropriate antibiotic is prescribed, almost all superficial skin infections heal. MRSA skin infections are usually *not* worse than typical staph infections in previously healthy school children. If you have any concerns about your child's health, you should contact your health care provider.

The simplest and most important measure to prevent the spread of staph infections is to use good personal hygiene, which consists of hand washing, proper care of skin injuries and skin infections, and avoiding sharing personal items such as razors, headgear, and towels. Children who do have MRSA infections should be allowed to go to school as long as they are not ill and as long as the wound can be fully covered by bandages. **The Health Department recommends that students with diagnosed MRSA in a skin infection check in with the school nurse upon return to school for clearance to participate in gym and sports.** Environmental clean up is rarely indicated.

We have included with this letter the New York State Department of Health CA-MRSA fact sheets. We will continue to work with school districts to investigate any outbreaks that may occur and to distribute educational materials to curb the spread of these persistent infections.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alice Cole".

Alice Cole, RN, M.S.E.  
Public Health Director

Enc.

# New York State Department of Health

## Community-Associated Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus Aureus* (CA-MRSA) - Fact Sheet

Last Reviewed: October 2007

### What is *Staphylococcus aureus*?

*Staphylococcus aureus* (*S. aureus*) is a bacteria normally found on the skin or in the nose of 20 to 30 percent of healthy individuals. When *S. aureus* is present without causing symptoms, it is called colonization. If symptoms are present, it is called an infection.

### What is MRSA?

Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) is a strain of *S. aureus* that is resistant to methicillin, an antibiotic in the same class as penicillin, and is traditionally seen in people who have been recently hospitalized or who have been treated at a health care facility (such as treatment at a dialysis center).

### What is CA-MRSA?

Community-associated MRSA infections (CA-MRSA) are MRSA infections in healthy people who have not been hospitalized or had a medical procedure (such as dialysis or surgery) within the past year.

### Who gets CA-MRSA?

Anyone can get CA-MRSA, however outbreaks have been seen among athletes, prisoners, military recruits, daycare attendees, injection drug users and other groups of people who live in crowded settings and/or routinely share contaminated items. Poor hygiene practices, such as lack of hand washing, may spread the bacteria easily.

### What are the symptoms associated with CA-MRSA infection?

CA-MRSA infections typically begin as skin infections. They first appear as reddened areas on the skin, or can resemble pimples that develop into skin abscesses or boils causing fever, pus, swelling, or pain.

### How are CA-MRSA infections treated?

CA-MRSA skin infections can be treated by draining any abscesses or boils and providing localized care. Antibiotics can be given if necessary. When left untreated, CA-MRSA infections can progress to serious complications. Visit your health care provider if you think you might have a MRSA infection.

### How do I know if I got MRSA from the community or from a health care setting?

Most MRSA infections are found in people who are or have recently been hospitalized. CA-MRSA is usually diagnosed when the patient has an MRSA infection and *has not* had surgery, dialysis, nor been admitted to a hospital or other health care facilities in the past year. CA-MRSA can also be diagnosed when a person has a MRSA infection that began too soon after admission to be acquired in the hospital.

## How is it transmitted?

CA-MRSA is spread in the same way as an MRSA infection, mainly through person-to-person contact or contact with a contaminated item such as a towel, clothing or athletic equipment. Bacteria that exist normally on the skin cause CA-MRSA and so it is possible to infect a pre-existing cut not protected by a dressing or other bandage.

## How can the spread of CA-MRSA be controlled?

Careful hand washing is the single most effective way to control the spread of CA-MRSA. Skin infections caused by MRSA should be covered until healed, especially to avoid spreading the infection to others. Family members and others with close contact should wash their hands frequently with soap and water. Personal items that may be contaminated (towels, razors, clothing, etc.) should not be shared.

Both the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) have issued recommendations for preventing the spread of MRSA among athletes. These include practicing good personal hygiene, including showering after practices and competitions and not sharing personal items such as towels. Athletes who participate in sports where equipment is often collectively used are encouraged to reduce sharing as much as possible and to regularly wipe-down equipment/mats with commercial disinfectants or a 1:100 solution of diluted bleach (one tablespoon bleach in one quart water).

## Where can I get further information on CA-MRSA?

- Further information is available on [Overview of Community-Associated MRSA](#) on the CDC's Web site or by calling your [local health department](#).
- [A Guide for Coaches: Preventing the Spread of Bacteria Among Your Athletes](#) (PDF, 291KB, 2pg.)
- [An Athlete's Guide to Prevent the Spread of Bacteria](#) (PDF, 276KB, 2pg.)
- A similar [fact sheet on general MRSA infections in health care settings](#) is also available on the NYSDOH website.

Revised: October 2007

## **NYSDOH Recommendations to Prevent CA-MRSA**

### **Wound Care**

- Cuts or other abrasions on the skin should be washed with soap and water and covered with dry, sterile bandages.
- Keep all wounds covered. A clean dressing should be applied every day until healed.
- All wounds should be cared for while wearing gloves.
- Soiled dressings should be handled with gloves and disposed of after handling.
- Wash hands frequently before and after exposure to contaminated persons and equipment.

### **Prevention Strategies**

- Coaches and trainers should always use gloves when attending to an athlete's wounds. Before and after performing care, hands should be either washed with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
- Assess skin regularly for any lesions. Refer athletes with wounds to appropriate health care personnel and assure little to no contact to other players.
- Learn to recognize wounds that could be potentially infectious.
- Launder personal items, such as towels, and clean sports equipment frequently, ideally after each use.
- Encourage school nurse participation at the beginning of every season to teach players how to recognize skin infections.
- If an infection is identified, involve appropriate personnel, such as the school

nurse, administration and parents to take proper precautions in avoiding the spreading of the infection.

- Report any clusters of athletes with skin infections to your local health department.

### **For additional information on MRSA, visit:**

New York State Department of Health  
[www.nyhealth.gov](http://www.nyhealth.gov)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)



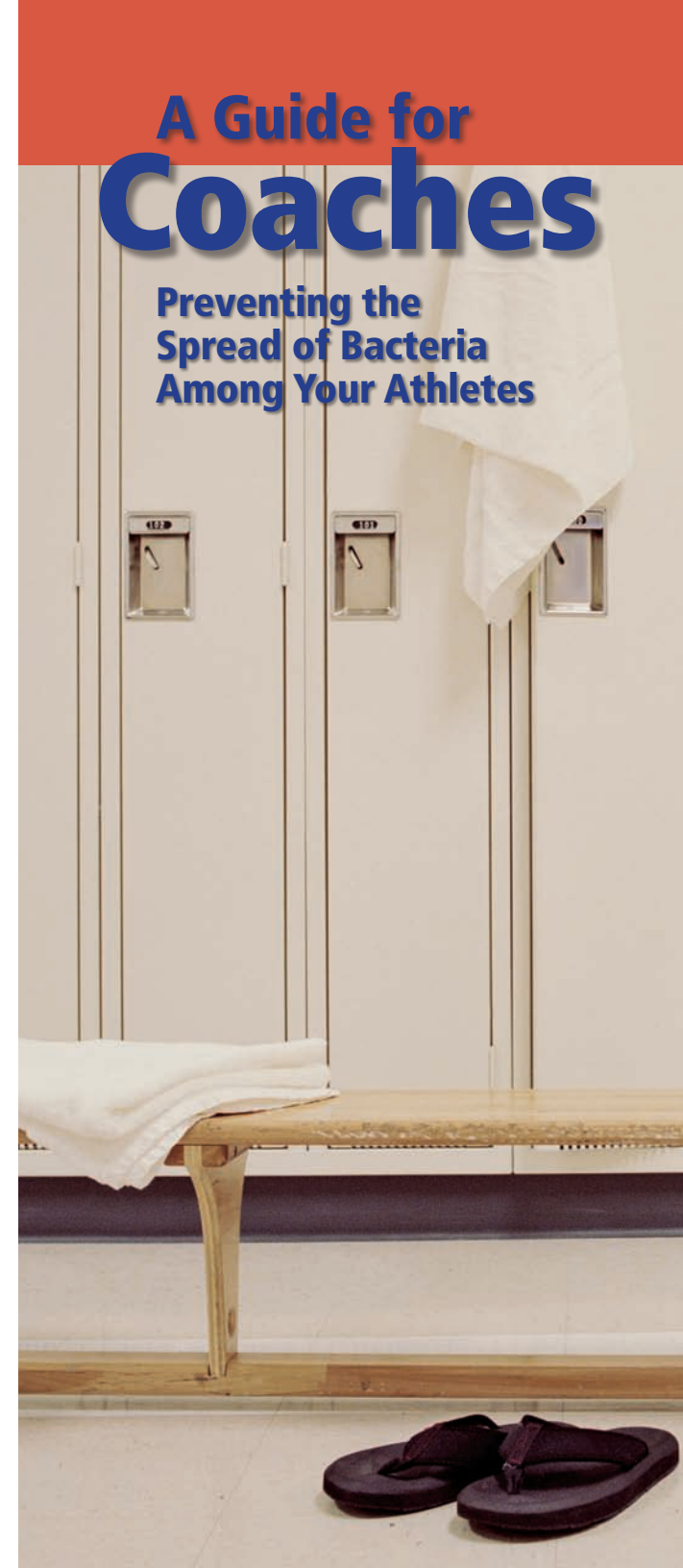
### **A Guide for Coaches: Preventing the Spread of Bacteria Among Your Athletes**

Information in this brochure has been adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a division of the Department of Health and Human Services

State of New York  
Eliot Spitzer, Governor  
Department of Health  
Richard F. Daines, M.D., Commissioner

# **A Guide for Coaches**

## **Preventing the Spread of Bacteria Among Your Athletes**

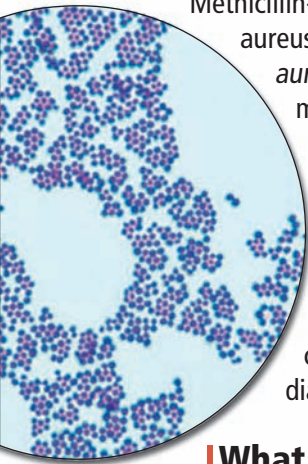


## What is *Staphylococcus aureus*?

*Staphylococcus aureus* (*S. aureus*) is a bacteria commonly found on the skin and in the nose of 20-30 percent of healthy individuals. This bacteria often causes skin infections, but can also cause other more serious infections, such as pneumonia or bloodstream infections.

## What is MRSA?

Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) is a strain of *S. aureus* that is resistant to methicillin, an antibiotic in the same class as penicillin. MRSA is traditionally seen in people recently hospitalized or who **have been** treated at a health care facility, such as a dialysis center.



## What is CA-MRSA?

Community-associated MRSA (CA-MRSA) infections are considered to be community-associated because they occur in people who have not been hospitalized or had a medical procedure, such as dialysis or surgery, within the past year.

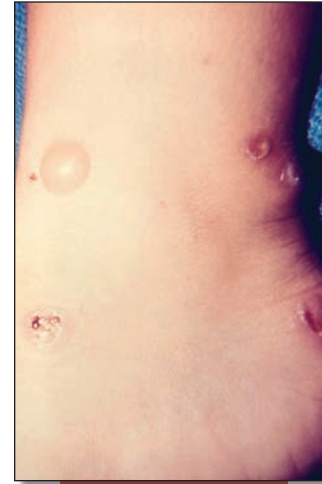
CA-MRSA infections have been documented among athletes, prisoners, military recruits, day care attendees, injection drug users, and others who live in crowded settings or routinely share contaminated items.

## What does a CA-MRSA skin infection look like?

A skin infection with CA-MRSA can begin as a reddened area on the skin, or resemble a pimple that can develop into a skin abscess or boil causing fever, pus, swelling or pain.

CA-MRSA skin infections can be treated by a health care professional by incising, draining, and locally caring for the wound. Antibiotics may be administered as necessary. These infections can progress to a more serious and difficult-to-treat stage if not treated properly and promptly.

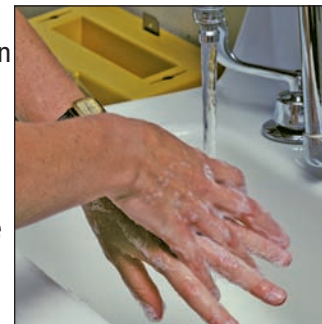
It is also possible for a pre-existing cut, turfburn or other irritated area on the skin to develop an infection with CA-MRSA if the area is not kept clean and dry.



Infection site: ankle  
May be mistaken for spider bites

## How is CA-MRSA spread?

CA-MRSA is spread through person-to-person contact or contact with contaminated items such as towels, razors, uniforms and athletic equipment. Poor hygiene practices help facilitate the spread of the bacteria.



## How can CA-MRSA skin infections be prevented on MY Team?

Both the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have identified CA-MRSA as a potential problem among athletes. The NCAA recommends practicing good personal hygiene and avoiding contact with infected areas to prevent the transmission of CA-MRSA.

### Role as an Educator

- Encourage athletes who participate in sports involving contact (football, wrestling, etc.) to shower with soap as soon as possible after practices and competitions.
- Athletes who share equipment are encouraged to regularly clean this equipment with commercial disinfectants or a solution of one tablespoon of bleach in one quart water.
- Encourage players not to share towels or other personal items such as uniforms or equipment.
- Educate players on the importance of wound care and hand hygiene.

### Role as an Administrator

- Ensure availability of adequate soap and hot water.
- Establish routine cleaning schedules for shared equipment, such as towels, uniforms, helmets, athletic equipment and mats.
- If a player has a wound that cannot be covered adequately, consider excluding the player from practice or competitions until the wound can be covered or has completely healed.

## **NYSDOH Recommendations to Prevent CA-MRSA**

- Shower thoroughly with soap after all practices and competitions. Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizers. If your hands are visibly soiled, wash thoroughly with soap and water.
- Do not share towels or other personal items such as clothing, razors or equipment. Since these items can become contaminated and may spread disease, regularly wash items after each use.
- Check your skin regularly for any reddened areas, pimples or boils causing pus, swelling or pain.
- Avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages.
- All cuts and other abrasions on the skin should be washed with soap and water and covered with dry, sterile bandages. These bandages should be replaced daily until healed.
- If you have a wound that can not be covered adequately, notify your coach or school nurse.
- Consider refraining from practice or competitions until the wound can be covered or has completely healed.
- Tell your school nurse, coach or athletic trainer if you think you have a skin infection. Sports gear, such as helmets, that are non-washable should be wiped down with disinfectants after each use.
- Ask about routine cleaning schedules for shared equipment, such as towels, uniforms and athletic equipment.
- See your health care provider if you think you have CA-MRSA.

- If an infection is identified, involve appropriate personnel, such as coach, school nurse, administration and parents to take proper precautions to avoid the spread of infection.

### **For additional information on MRSA, visit:**

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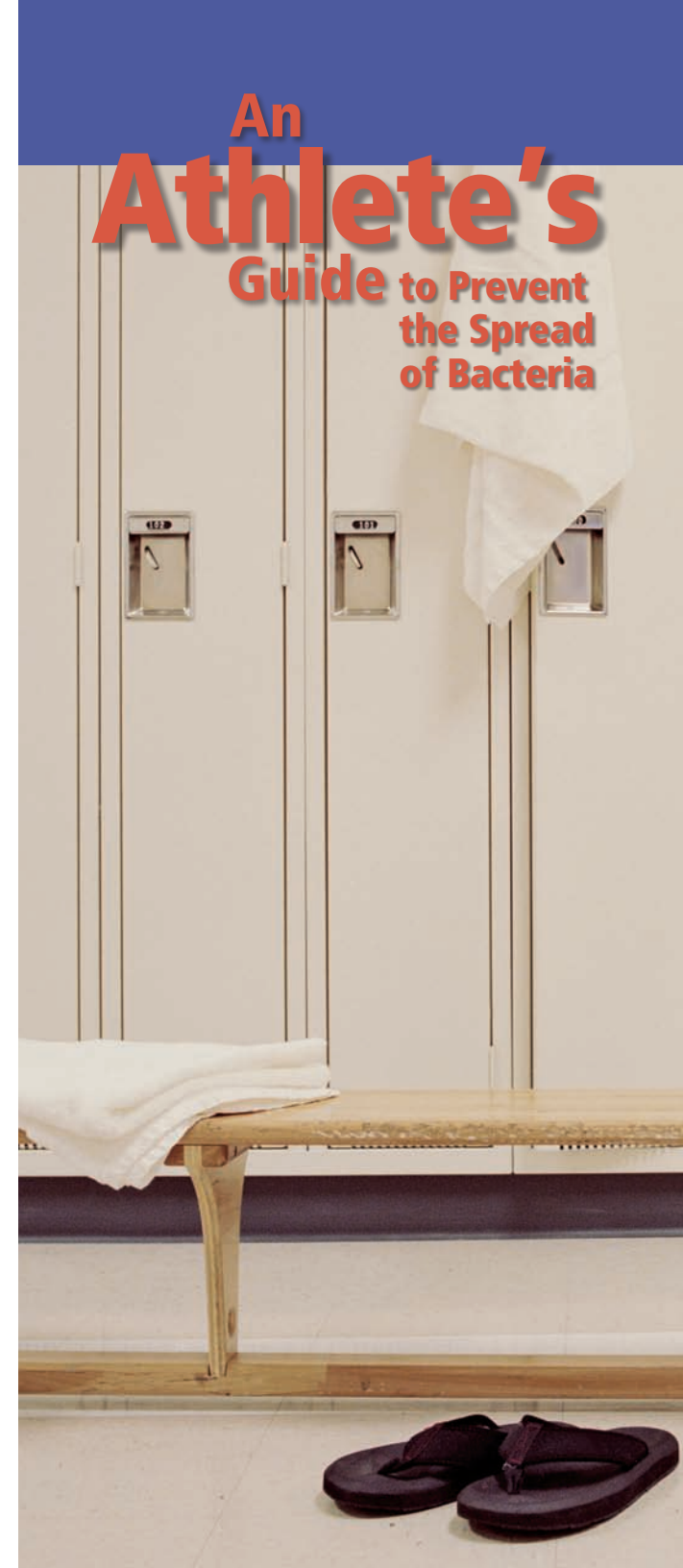


### **An Athlete's Guide to Prevent the Spread of Bacteria**

Information in this brochure has been adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a division of the Department of Health and Human Services

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# **An Athlete's Guide to Prevent the Spread of Bacteria**

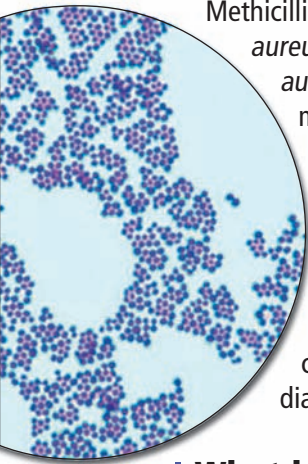


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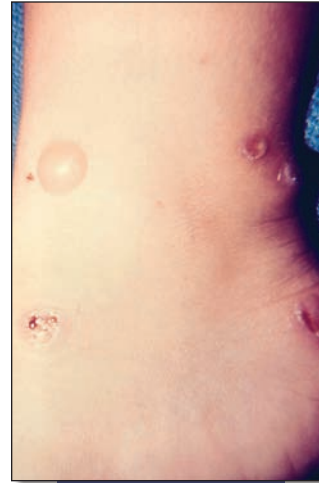
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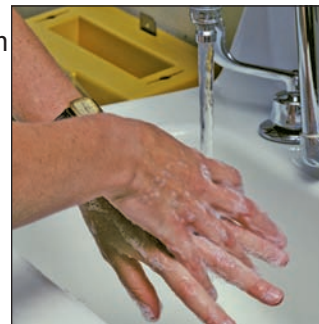
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## How can athletes prevent CA-MRSA skin infections?

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Athletes who participate in sports involving contact (football, wrestling, etc.) should shower with soap as soon as possible after practices and competitions. Avoid sharing personal items such as towels or razors.

Athletes who share equipment are encouraged to regularly clean this equipment with commercial disinfectants or a solution of one tablespoon of bleach in one quart water.

All cuts or other abrasions on the skin should be washed with soap and water. Clean dressings should be applied every day until healed. Soiled dressings should be disposed of adequately after handling. Hands should be washed before and after performing wound care.

For thorough care instruction, consult your school nurse or your health care professional.