

Staph and MRSA in Schools

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In light of recent events and publicity regarding bacterial infections, Forsyth County Schools is providing students, staff and parents with necessary information regarding ordinary staph (*Staphylococcus aureus*) infections and MRSA (Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*). These infections occur sporadically in our school population, just as they do in all populations.

What is staph?

Staphylococcus aureus, often referred to simply as "staph," are bacteria commonly carried on the skin or in the nose of healthy people. Approximately 25% to 30% of the population is colonized (when bacteria are present, but not causing an infection) in the nose with staph bacteria. Sometimes, staph can cause an infection. Staph bacteria are one of the most common causes of skin infections in the United States. Most of these skin infections are minor (such as pimples and boils) and can be treated without antibiotics (also known as antimicrobials or antibacterials). However, staph bacteria also can cause serious infections (such as surgical wound infections, bloodstream infections, and pneumonia).

What is MRSA?

Some staph bacteria are resistant to antibiotics. MRSA is a type of staph that is resistant to antibiotics called beta-lactams. Beta-lactam antibiotics include methicillin and other more common antibiotics such as oxacillin, penicillin and amoxicillin. While 25% to 30% of the population is colonized with staph, approximately 1% is colonized with MRSA.

What does a staph or MRSA infection look like?

Staph bacteria, including MRSA, can cause skin infections that may look like a pimple or boil and can be red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. More serious infections may cause pneumonia, bloodstream infections, or surgical wound infections.

The school system is ensuring that school facilities are cleaned appropriately. Parents and students can help by encouraging and practicing proper hygiene, especially:

1. Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
2. Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed.
3. Avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages.
4. Avoid sharing personal items such as towels or razors.

For more information, please contact your healthcare provider.

Please inform your student's teacher and school nurse if a MRSA infection should happen to occur.

Information provided by www.cdc.gov, 2007.

Stopping Germs at Home, Work and School
How Germs Spread
The main way that illnesses like colds and flu are spread is from person to person in respiratory droplets of coughs and sneezes. This is called "droplet spread." This can happen when droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person move through the air and are deposited on the mouth or nose of people nearby.

Sometimes germs also can be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets from another person on a surface like a desk and then touches his or her own eyes, mouth or nose before washing their hands. We know that some viruses and bacteria can live 2 hours or longer on surfaces like cafeteria tables, doorknobs, and desks. How to Stop the Spread of Germs In a nutshell: take care to • Cover your mouth and nose • Clean your hands often • Remind your children to practice healthy habits, too Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing Cough or sneeze into a tissue and then throw it away. Cover your cough or sneeze if you do not have a tissue. Then, clean your hands, and do so every time you cough or sneeze. The "Happy Birthday" song helps keep your hands clean? Not exactly. Yet we recommend that when you wash your hands with soap and warm water that you wash for 15 to 20 seconds. That's about the same time it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice! Alcohol Based Hand Wipes and Gel Sanitizers Work Too When soap and water are not available, alcohol based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used. You can find them in most supermarkets and drugstores. If using gel, rub your hands until the gel is dry. The gel doesn't need water to work; the alcohol in it kills the germs on your hands.* * Source: FDA/CFSAN Food Safety A to Z Reference Guide, September 2001: Handwashing. Germs and Children Remind children to practice healthy habits too, because germs spread, especially at school. The flu has caused high rates of absenteeism among students and staff in our country's 119,000 schools. Influenza is not the only respiratory infection of concern in schools nearly 22 million school days are lost each year to the common cold alone. However, when children practice healthy habits, they miss fewer days of school. Information provided by www.cdc.gov, 2007. Preventive information provided by Forsyth County Schools, 2007

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