Indiana State Department of Health
Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About…Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) in Schools

What is MRSA and why is it a concern for schools?

MRSA is a specific type of *Staphylococcus aureus* (Staph) bacteria that is resistant to many kinds of antibiotics, making it more difficult to treat. MRSA infections in students or school employees can cause a great deal of worry for parents and others in the community. Schools may provide good conditions for transmission, but with proper preventative procedures the spread of MRSA (and other Staph infections) can be controlled (see MRSA Quick Facts).

How is MRSA spread in schools?

MRSA is spread normally through direct skin-to-skin contact. MRSA and other Staph infections can also be spread through contact with items such as, towels and shared athletic equipment that have been touched by a person with a MRSA infection. Due to factors in schools such as, crowding, frequent skin-to-skin contact, compromised skin (e.g. cuts or scrapes caused during sporting events or gym classes), contaminated items and lack of cleanliness, the spread of infection is easy to occur.

Should schools be closed when MRSA infections occur?

Schools SHOULD NOT be closed due to MRSA infections in students or school employees. MRSA transmission can be prevented by simple measures such as, proper and frequent hand hygiene, the covering of wounds, and routine cleaning of surfaces. Local and state public health officials should be consulted if school closing is being considered.

Should schools be completely disinfected when a MRSA infection occurs?

Generally, it is NOT NECESSARY to “disinfect” schools when MRSA infections occur. Surfaces that are likely to have had contact with uncovered or poorly covered

draining wounds should be cleaned and disinfected. Covering infections with clean dry bandages reduces the risk of surfaces becoming contaminated with MRSA. When cleaning and disinfection is necessary on surfaces suspected of being contaminated, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registered disinfectants should be used exactly as indicated on the label of the product. A fresh (prepared daily) 1:100 dilution of sodium hypochlorite (bleach) is an effective alternative disinfectant.

How can MRSA transmission be prevented in schools?

Schools should consider these general guidelines for prevention of MRSA:

- Provide any case of MRSA with general information about the disease such as, the ISDH MRSA Quick Facts
- Encourage proper, frequent hand washing
- Ensure access to sinks, soaps and clean towels
- Have alcohol-based sanitizers available if soap and water is not available
- Discourage sharing of personal items such as towels, razors, toothbrushes
- Regularly clean sinks, showers and toilets
- Encourage daily showers and bathing with soap and water
- Launder towels, sheets, sports uniforms, underclothing and dry completely on the hottest setting

Should the entire school community and school employees be notified of every MRSA infection?

Normally it is not necessary to inform the entire school community, including parents, about each case of MRSA. When a MRSA infection occurs in a student or school employee, then the school nurse, administrators and school physician should determine whether all or some students and/or school employees should be notified. It should be remembered that MRSA and other Staph infections have been a common cause of skin infections for many years. If a notification letter is sent home, the local public health department should be informed prior to the letter being sent.

Should students or school employees with MRSA be excluded from school?

There are no specific exclusion provisions found in Indiana Communicable Disease laws or rules for MRSA. Students or school employees should not be excluded from attending school unless directed by a health care provider, or if wound drainage cannot be covered and contained with a dry bandage, or if good personal hygiene cannot be demonstrated. Students and school employees do not need to be isolated or sent home in the middle of the school day if a suspected skin infection that could be Staph or MRSA is noticed. Ensure the affected area is washed with soap and water and covered.

What additional advice is there for school health staff?

School health personnel should notify parents/guardians when their child has a possible skin infection, and if necessary the student should be referred to a health care provider for diagnosis and treatment. School nurses and others should use standard precautions (e.g., hand hygiene before and after contact, wearing gloves) when caring for potential infections. The ISDH has a Care of Your Skin poster that can be downloaded and strategically placed in the school.

How can teachers help?

Teachers who observe students with open draining wounds or skin infections should refer the student to the school nurse. Teachers should encourage and enforce hand hygiene with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizers before eating, after using the restroom, and other appropriate times.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
MRSA Infections
http://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/
http://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/community/schools/index.html
http://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/community/environment/index.html
http://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/community/photos/index.html

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