

MSAD # 13 / RSU #83

Health Alert

Staphylococcus Aureus Important Notice to Parents

Staphylococcus aureus (staph) bacteria commonly reside on the skin or in the nose of healthy individuals and do not cause infection. When these bacteria enter the body through a break in the skin, they can cause mild skin infections, such as pimples, abscesses, impetigo, boils, or an infected open wound, causing fever, reddening, pain, warmth, swelling, and pus. The infection may be mistaken for a spider bite. Staph can also cause serious infections, such as bloodstream and bone infections or pneumonia. Most staph infections are antibiotic sensitive and treated with methicillin and other antibiotics related to penicillin.

The incubation period is variable and indefinite since *S. aureus* can be on the skin or in the nares (nostrils) or an extended period before causing infection in a wound.

Staph is spread by direct physical contact with an infected person, either by direct skin contact or indirect contact with inanimate object (such as towels, razors, soap, washcloths, clothes, bandages, or sports equipment such as helmets and uniforms) that is soiled with wound drainage. The bacteria are not carried through the air, and they are not found in dirt or mud.

A person is able to spread staph if an open wound is not properly covered. People can have staph bacteria 'colonized' on the skin or in the nose and not be infected, but can spread the bacteria to others. Any boil, abscess, or open wound could have *S. aureus* or other bacterial infection. Any draining skin lesion should be considered infectious

Students 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. Individuals with compromised immune systems may need to consult with their health care provider to determine if it is safe for them to be in a classroom with a student recovering from any staph infection.

Staph infection can be controlled or prevented by following these simple precaution methods at all times: • Frequent hand-washing. • Keep infected areas covered with a clean, dry bandage that is closed on all four sides. If possible, people with staph infections should do their own first aid on cuts/scrapes. This prevents spread to others. • Avoid direct contact with another person's wound, drainage, or bandages. • Avoid contact with surfaces contaminated with wound drainage. • Do not share personal hygiene items, such as washcloths, towels, razors, toothbrushes, soap, deodorant, nail clippers, clothing, or uniforms. • Keep contaminated laundry separate from other laundry. Wash clothes, bed sheets, and blankets in hot water with detergent and dry in a hot dryer. • Shared athletic equipment and surfaces should be cleaned before use.

Athletes with active skin and soft tissue infections should be excluded from participating in wrestling or other contact sports unless the wound can be properly covered. They should also not use common use water facilities such as pools, whirlpools, or therapy pools unless cleaned between users. Athletes should use of a barrier (towel or layer of clothing) between the skin and shared equipment as well as surfaces such as benches. Showering with soap immediately after participating in sports involving close personal contact (e.g. wrestling and football) will help prevent infection and athletes should wash athletic clothing after each use. The determination to return to sports following referral for a skin infection or diagnosis of staph or other skin infection is made by the student's primary care provider. It is typically done on a case by case basis and is not a set number of days.

Individuals with any wound which shows signs of infection, such as redness, swelling, pain, or drainage should see their health care provider. Prompt referral to a health care provider for evaluation and treatment will prevent the infection from becoming worse.

Please contact the school nurse, Mel Chadbourne, RN if you have any questions. More information is also available at the Maine CDC web site.

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