



October 25, 2007

Dear Parents:

We are writing to inform you of a health issue that recently has received considerable attention in the media and is understandably a concern for parents. A number of school systems across the country, including the Martin County School District, have reported cases of students with a bacterial skin infection that has shown resistance to penicillin. The infection is known as community acquired Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus or MRSA. In most cases, MRSA infections are mild and can be successfully treated with appropriate antibiotics and by following good hygienic practices. For individuals with poor immune systems, there is a potential for severe complications.

The Martin County Health Department and the Martin County School District have implemented many proactive measures to prevent the spread of community acquired MRSA in our schools, particularly among school athletes (due to the close physical contact involved in sporting events). These steps are continually reviewed and updated as necessary.

- The Martin County Health Department (MCHD) provided education about MRSA and prevention strategies to all athletic coaches and athletic directors prior to the start of the new school year.
- All school nurses and all school health assistants received MRSA training from the MCHD prior to the start of the new school year.
- The MCHD has reviewed and updated infection control protocols for all schools within the Martin County School District.
- Custodial crews at all Martin County schools continue to follow their regular, thorough, daily, school-wide cleaning procedures for disinfecting student areas.
- All Martin County Schools have ongoing educational campaigns regarding proper hand-washing.
- The MCHD Environmental Health Services and Epidemiology staff conducted inspections at all three high school athletic facilities (Martin County High School, Jensen Beach High School, and South Fork High School).
- The MCHD reviewed existing procedures for cleaning and disinfecting athletic facilities and equipment with custodial crews at each high school.
- The MCHD provided letters to be distributed to all high school athletes at each of the three high schools.
- As a proactive measure, all middle school and high school locker rooms are being sanitized by an outside agency.
- Additional recommendations and proactive measures are being implemented at Martin County High School due to the cluster of confirmed MRSA cases.

Health situations, such as MRSA, can cause anxiety among students and parents. One of the most effective things we can all do is to remain calm and follow the prevention guidelines, which involve practicing good personal hygiene. A fact-sheet with information on what you can do to help prevent the spread of MRSA is attached to this letter.

The health and safety of our students, families, and community is always our priority. Please be assured, the Martin County School District continues to follow all of the recommendations of the Martin County Health Department regarding this issue. More information on MRSA, including a link to the Center for Disease Control's Frequently Asked MRSA Questions and Answers, can be found on our School District's website, www.sbmc.org.

Thank you for your continued support.

Respectfully,

Sara A. Wilcox, Ph.D.
Superintendent

Mark Chittum, FACHE
Administrator, Martin County Health Department



Charlie Crist
Governor

Ana M. Viamonte Ros, M.D., MPH
State Surgeon General

What is MRSA:

MRSA is a type of skin infection caused by bacteria which has shown resistance to penicillin. In most cases, MRSA infections are mild and can be successfully treated with appropriate antibiotics and by following good hygienic practices. For individuals with poor immune systems, there is a potential for severe complications.

Transmission

Risk factors associated with the spread of MRSA include:

- direct skin-to-skin contact with infected persons or contaminated surfaces
- sharing contaminated personal items (towels, clothing, uniforms, razors)
- poor hygiene, lack of showering, re-use of soiled uniforms, improper cleaning of gear

Symptoms

The infected area usually starts as a small bump or pimple, resembling a “spider bite”, which becomes progressively more red, swollen, and painful and may have pus or other drainage.

Prevention

- Skin lesions should be kept covered with a clean bandage especially if they are draining.
- Inform coaches of any skin lesions before practice or competition.
- Never touch another person’s wound, infected skin, or dirty bandages. Should this occur accidentally, immediately wash with soap and water.
- Shower after participating in close contact sports as soon as possible.
- Do not share bars of soap, razors, towels or any personal items.
- Uniforms, towels, and other soiled items should be washed with hot water and laundry detergent after each use.
- Clean recreational equipment, such as weight benches, before direct contact with your body; or use a clean barrier, such as a towel, between your bare skin and exercise equipment.
- Use spray bottle with disinfectant / sanitizing wipes provided in the gym area to clean equipment before use.

What to do if you have a skin lesion

If a person is suspected of having these lesions, report to your school health nurse for an evaluation. You may be referred to your private physician. If antibiotics are prescribed, the course should be completed. The lesion should be covered until it has healed. The Health Department, in collaboration with the School District, principals, and athletic directors, has already implemented prevention and control measures. However, the process will only succeed if there is a clear understanding and cooperation among students, parents, and members of the community.

We strongly recommend that these protocols are followed. Please educate others!

If there are any questions or concerns, please call the Martin County Health Department at (772) 221-4000 (Monday thru Friday, 9 A.M. – 5 P.M.)