

Dear Parents of Athletes,

In recent years there has been an increase in the number of communicable diseases being spread from one athlete to another. We would like to take this opportunity to inform you about three communicable diseases associated with sports and ways you can help us prevent the spread of these diseases.

Skin Infections - Staph Infections (MRSA)

In some sports, athletes have skin-to-skin contact or equipment that may chafe the skin. Both of these conditions increase the chance of a skin infection. There are a growing number of athletes that are being diagnosed with staph infections. Staph is a type of bacteria that is commonly found on the skin and in the noses of healthy people. Approximately 25-30% of the population carries staph in their noses. Staph bacteria are one of the most common causes of skin infections in the United States. Although it is usually harmless at these sites, it may occasionally get into the body through breaks in the skin such as abrasions and cuts, causing an infection. These infections may be mild (pimples, boils) or serious (causing infection of the bloodstream, bones or joints). Over the past 50 years, treatments of these infections have become more difficult because staph bacteria have become resistant to various antibiotics, including the commonly used penicillin-related antibiotics. One of these resistant bacteria is called Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA).

How is Staph Transmitted?

- Abrasions and skin trauma allow the bacteria to enter through a break in the skin.
- Protective clothing retains body heat and may chafe the skin resulting in abrasions/lacerations
- Person to person contact
- The use of shared equipment items that are not cleaned or laundered between users.

What to do if you notice your student has a skin infection:

- Notify the coach immediately

When do I take my student to a health care provider?

- If you or your coach notices that your student has a possible infection (pain, redness, swelling and increased temperature at the site, and oozing pus or blood). Here are a few common skin infections caused by the staph bacteria:
 - Boils – tender, red lumps that swell and get white heads like large pimples. Boils form on oily or moist skin such as the neck, armpits, groin and buttocks. They may break open and ooze pus or blood.
 - Impetigo – blisters with fluid in them, which may pop and get a yellow crust. Children often get it on the face. It can spread by scratching.
 - Infected hair roots (follicles) small bumps under the skin at the base of the hair. They may itch.

What your health care provider might do:

- Your health care provider may drain the sore and take a culture of the skin lesion
- If antibiotics are prescribed, your student should take the full course and call your health care provider if the infection does not get better.

What will happen if my student has a skin lesion?

- Your student will be restricted from participating if they have open or draining wound/sores until the wound/sores have healed and your health care provider has cleared your student.

Mononucleosis

Mononucleosis is transmitted through close person-to-person contact. (kissing or using personal items which may be contaminated with saliva such as water bottles) The Epstein-Barr virus causes Infectious Mononucleosis or “Mono”. This is an acute and usually benign infectious disease. Most students recover uneventfully in 2-4 weeks. Symptoms may wax and wane.

What are the Common Signs and Symptoms of mononucleosis?

- Fever
- Headache
- Enlarged liver or spleen
- Fatigue (may persist for several weeks and occasionally for months)
- Sore throat
- Swollen glands, especially in the neck
- Jaundice - “yellow” skin and whites of the eyes

How is mononucleosis transmitted?

- Sharing drinks
- Kissing

How long does my student have to be out of school/sports?

- Students may return to school when they no longer have a fever.
- The student should avoid P.E. and contact sports for six to eight weeks after the onset of the illness, since the spleen and liver can be enlarged and are more susceptible to possible injury and/or rupture.
- The student should avoid heavy lifting or strenuous exercise until the spleen/liver enlargement has disappeared.

What precautions should be taken when a student has mononucleosis?

- Students should not share food or drinks
- Students should practice good hand washing.
- If the student receives an injury to the area below the rib cage, call 911.

Bacterial Meningitis

Bacterial meningitis is transmitted from person-to-person through respiratory droplets. One team member who has the bacteria could potentially transmit it to others through close personal contact.

What are the common signs of symptoms of bacterial meningitis?

- High fever and chills
- Headache
- Sometimes a rash
- Stiff neck
- Vomiting
- Seizures

Prevention

How to Prevent Staph Infections:

- Good hygiene – athletes should shower with soap and warm water after all practices and competitions
- Avoid contact with wounds or material contaminated with drainage from skin lesions
- Do not share towels, clothing, equipment and personal items (razors, lotions, balms, deodorant, bars of soap)
- Towels, uniforms and practice clothes must be washed **daily** in hot water and dried on the hot setting in the dryer. Do not line-dry the clothing.
- Do not share headgear, kneepads or any other equipment. Equipment should be cleaned daily using a 1:10 bleach solution to disinfect the article.

How to Prevent Mononucleosis and Bacterial Meningitis:

- Athlete should use his/her own water bottle
- Athlete should use his/her own cup if a water cooler is used
- Athletes should not put their hands into the water source and scoop out water
- Athletes should not share food
- Good hand washing is the single most effective way to reduce the spread of disease.

Erik Titus
Athletic Director
