

## **Questions & Answers about Staph/Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) in Schools** *(Taken in part from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Website)*

CDC, local health departments, along with parents and school officials, want to do everything possible to protect students, employees and others from exposure to drug-resistant staph/MRSA infections in school settings.

We have received a report that a student at our school has had a confirmed case of staph infection. Below are answers to commonly asked questions about preventing the spread of these skin infections; suggestions as to what steps you can take to reduce the risk to you and your family; and information as to what FISD is doing to combat such risk.

### **What type of infections does MRSA cause?**

- In the community most MRSA infections are skin infections that may appear as pustules or boils which often are red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. These infections commonly occur at sites of visible skin trauma, such as cuts/abrasions, and areas of the body covered by hair (e.g., back of neck, groin, buttock, armpit, beard area of men).
- Almost all MRSA skin infections can be effectively treated by drainage of pus with or without antibiotics. More serious infections, such as pneumonia, bloodstream infections, or bone infections, are very rare in healthy people who get MRSA skin infections.

### **How is MRSA transmitted?**

- MRSA is usually transmitted by direct skin-to-skin contact or contact with shared items or surfaces that have come into contact with someone else's infection (e.g., towels, used bandages).

### **In what settings do MRSA skin infections occur?**

• *MRSA skin infections can occur anywhere.* Some settings have factors that make it easier for MRSA to be transmitted. These factors, referred to as the 5 C's, are as follows: Crowding, frequent skin-to-skin Contact, Compromised skin (i.e., cuts or abrasions), Contaminated items and surfaces, and lack of Cleanliness. Locations where the 5 C's are common include schools, dormitories, military barracks, households, correctional facilities, and daycare centers. *According to Collin County Health Department Officials MRSA is not an illness that schools are required by law to notify the health department about. That is because the infections are very, very common and often mild. Every school district in the County has likely had children either infected with or carrying this bug. Health officials say FISD has gone above and beyond by utilizing a specialized disinfecting procedure and also having hand sanitizer widely available for use. Stopping MRSA requires every person to practice good basic hygiene, they add.*

### **How do I protect myself and my children from getting MRSA?**

- You can reduce the risk to yourself /your children by taking the following steps and insisting your children do the same:
  - practicing good hygiene (e.g., keeping your hands clean by washing with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer and showering immediately after participating in exercise);
  - covering skin trauma such as abrasions or cuts with a clean dry bandage until healed (and making sure that your children let you know when they have a cut or abrasion);
  - avoiding sharing personal items (e.g., towels, razors) that come into contact with your bare skin; and using a barrier (e.g., clothing or a towel) between your skin and shared equipment such as weight-training benches;
  - maintaining a clean environment by establishing cleaning procedures for frequently touched surfaces and surfaces that come into direct contact with people's skin. *In the Frisco ISD we have a daily cleaning routine that involves wiping all high contact areas, including desks, door handles, computer keyboards, and restrooms with disinfecting wipes and a disinfecting/deodorizing cleaner. A disinfecting cleaner is used in mopping floors, including gym floors, on a daily basis. The custodial department began a routine program this school year for disinfecting all*

athletic areas, and FISD uses several types of disinfectants that are known to stop the spread of the staph bacteria. Locker rooms are cleaned through a "fogging" system; lockers are wiped down with a similar type of disinfectant. Steam cleaning of athletic equipment is the preferred method since some students may have sensitivity to disinfectants that are used. In addition, the athletic clothing we issue is being laundered with a special type of detergent. The athletic areas are emphasized because there is more opportunity for students to have skin to skin contact or to have contact with equipment. **If there is a confirmed case of staph infection involving a student at any school, cleaning crews will conduct a special disinfecting cleaning.**

### **Should the entire school community be notified of every staph/MRSA infection?**

• According to the Centers for Disease Control, it should not be necessary to inform the entire school community about a single infection. When an MRSA infection occurs within the school population, the school and health officials should determine, based on their medical judgment, whether some or all students, parents and staff should be notified. Consultation with the local public health authorities should be used to guide this decision. *In FISD, we are still only receiving isolated reports of staph infections, but when we do receive an initial confirmed report at a school we will notify parents of that school to increase awareness. Due to confidentiality and student health privacy issues, FISD attorneys have advised us not to identify specific children or a specific type of infection that might identify a particular child, but we will work with the health department to determine when or if any specific notifications should take place. Cleaning and preventative protocols are the same for staph or MRSA and the health department states that we should not be concerned with the strain as many times cultures are not even taken. **Remember that staphylococcus (staph) bacteria, including MRSA, have been and remain a common cause of skin infections.***

### **Should the school be notified that my child has an MRSA infection?**

• *We ask that you contact your school nurse to report cases of staph/MRSA, so we can implement additional cleaning protocols as needed and can discuss this information with the Health Department. Our nurses are working to evaluate students for any suspicious rashes/skin disorders to help facilitate early detection and treatment if needed.*

### **Should students with MRSA skin infections be excluded from attending school?**

- Unless directed by a physician, students with MRSA infections should not be excluded from attending school.
- Exclusion from school should be reserved for those with wound drainage ("pus") that cannot be covered and contained with a clean, dry bandage and for those who cannot maintain good personal hygiene.
- Students with active infections should be excluded from activities where skin-to-skin contact is likely to occur (e.g., sports) until their infections are healed.

### **I or my children have an MRSA skin infection. How do I prevent spreading it to others?**

- Cover your wound. Keep wounds that are draining or have pus covered with clean, dry bandages until healed. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions on proper care of the wound. Pus from infected wounds can contain staph, including MRSA, so keeping the infection covered will help prevent the spread to others. Bandages and tape can be discarded with the regular trash.
- Clean your hands frequently. You, your family, and others in close contact should wash their hands frequently with soap/water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially after changing the bandage or touching the infected wound.
- Do not share personal items. Avoid sharing personal items, such as towels, washcloths, razors, clothing, or uniforms that may have had contact with the infected wound or bandage. Wash sheets, towels, and clothes that become soiled with water and laundry detergent. Use a dryer to dry clothes completely.

For more information refer to the CDC.gov site or the Texas Department of State Health Services website at <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/> As always, your child's health, safety and welfare is of utmost importance to us all.