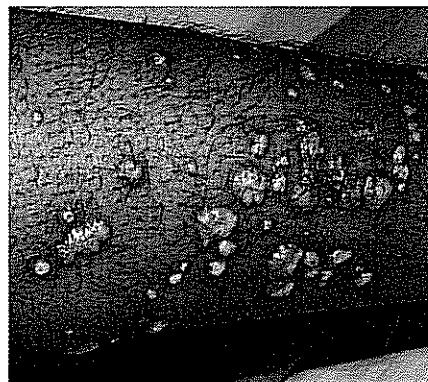


Winning the fight against staph and MRSA infections

Now – more than ever – parents must take proactive roles to help protect their young athletes from serious skin infections that are on the rise in sports

Staph and Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) infections – previously found almost exclusively in hospitals – have rapidly become a fact of life in all sports. Outbreaks are occurring with alarming regularity from the pee wee levels through the pro ranks, resulting in serious skin infections, hospitalization and sometimes, even death.

Coaches, players, parents and administrators all need to be aware of the presence of MRSA and staph bacteria, because it is easily spread in sports from person to person through direct skin contact or through cuts and abrasions on the skin that allow staph and MRSA to enter and cause infec-



tion. It also occurs through contact with shared items or surfaces, including towels and weight-training equipment surfaces.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Staphylococcus aureus bacteria is carried

by 30 percent of the population, and is very easily passed from one person to another. Adding to the problem is that commonly used antibiotics aren't effective in treating it.

MRSA infections can present itself in boils and ingrown hairs, cause bacterial blood poisoning and toxic shock syndrome, and even lead to potentially fatal bone infections.

Recent studies have suggested that more than 50 percent of all skin infections seen by doctors in some areas of the U.S. are MRSA infections.

Almost all MRSA and staph skin infections can effectively be treated, but it's important to act fast, get medical care from your healthcare provider and never try to treat the infection yourself.

Tips for preventing MRSA infections from sidelining your child

- Pay attention for signs of infections, such as redness, warmth, swelling, pus and pain at sites where the skin has sores, abrasions or cuts. Sometimes these infections can be confused with spider bites. Spotting infections early and getting proper treatment cuts down on the amount of playing time lost as well as reduces the chance of the infection becoming more severe.
- Infections can occur at sites covered by body hair or where uniforms or equipment cause skin irritation or increased rubbing, so pay extra close attention to these areas.
- Cover possible infections with clean bandages until the athlete can be seen by a doctor, nurse or athletic trainer. Never try to treat the infection yourself.
- Educate youngsters on the importance of keeping their hands clean and washing frequently with soap and water. When water is not available, like during a game or practice, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer or MRSA killing pre-moistened sanitizing wipes.
- Athletes should shower immediately after exercise without sharing towels or other personal items.
- Uniforms and clothing should be washed after each use and dried completely in a dryer, if possible.
- Protective clothing should be worn that is designed to prevent skin abrasions or cuts.
- Discourage players from sharing practice jerseys, batting gloves, batting helmets, towels or anything else that contacts their bare skin. *sk*

Scott Seabaugh is the founder and president of CleenFreek, the leader in sports hygiene prevention and protection. CleenFreek's extensive line of products and solutions are used by coaches, athletic trainers and athletes at all levels of sports.