



# Media Release

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## For Immediate Release

November 14, 2007

### Health Department Advises About MRSA in Schools

(Little Rock--) The Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) is reporting that a large number of parents across the state are expressing concern over the cleanliness of public schools in connection with the spread of community-acquired staph infections.

Parents concern was heightened by the announcement that the Palestine-Wheatley school district closed schools Tuesday after a student was hospitalized with a methicillin-resistant staph infection (MRSA). This type of staph is resistant to beta lactam antibiotics but is sensitive to commonly-used antibiotics.

“We have received numerous calls from parents who are concerned that their schools aren’t closing and cleaning in order to prevent the spread of staph infections,” said Dr. James Phillips, Branch Chief, Infectious Diseases. “This infection is spread by person-to-person contact in almost all cases. Therefore, closing schools for cleaning will have minimal impact and is not routinely recommended. The Palestine-Wheatley School closed as a proactive step. We appreciate the difficult position of the school and understand their independent decision to encourage parent confidence in the school’s clean environment.”

According to Phillips, despite the recent interest in MRSA, the condition is nothing new. “We have been working diligently over the last several years to provide education materials about MRSA. We regularly release information to the media; we work with school districts that need our guidance; we have a website with a section on MRSA prevention. We are currently working with the state Department of Education to provide health information about MRSA to schools throughout Arkansas. Education is the key here, and good personal hygiene is at the core of our messages for students,” he said. “The real take-home message for parents is to encourage your children to wash their hands and wash their hands often—after they go to the restroom, before they eat, any time their hands are dirty.”

The transmission of the bacteria is by person-to-person contact. About one-third of the population carries the staph bacteria in their noses. It’s extremely rare to develop MRSA from contact with surfaces such as desks and cafeteria tables.

At least 95 percent of community-acquired MRSA (CA-MRSA) infections appear on the skin or in the soft tissues. Most of these infections start out looking like a pimple or spider bite and

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may develop into boils or soft tissue infection. Most infections are usually mild and can be treated with incision and drainage with or without oral antibiotics, and by covering the infected area, keeping it clean and dry.

The greatest risk for MRSA occurs among persons who have close physical contact with one another resulting in skin abrasions or injuries such as in contact sports.

Prevention is key. If you are concerned about possible staph infection, here are some steps you can take to decrease the risk of exposure to your family and others around you:

- See a physician for diagnosis and treatment
- Cover all wounds with clean bandages, particularly those that produce drainage or pus.
- Wash your hands often, take frequent showers, and practice good hygiene.
- Don't share towels or personal items, such as razors, combs, clothing or sports equipment.
- Routinely clean any exercise equipment used by others.

If you think you have a staph infection, see your doctor. Coaches should be alert for skin infections and encourage athletes to seek medical treatment. For more information, including presentations and brochures on staph infection, click on <http://www.healthyarkansas.com/mrsa/information.html>.

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