

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Community-Acquired Staph Infections *Department Advises on Prevention*

(Little Rock--) The Arkansas Department of Health & Human Services continues to receive reports of increasing numbers of community-acquired staph infections. Some 10 – 30 percent of the population carry *Staphylococcus aureus* (staph), bacteria on the skin or in the nose. Some staph are resistant to commonly-used antibiotics and, thus, are called methicillin-resistant Staph. aureus (MRSA). MRSA infection is usually spread in hospital and healthcare settings through direct physical contact or indirect contact with contaminated towels, sheets, wound dressings, etc. However, in the last five to ten years, Arkansas and other states are seeing cases in patients that haven't been in a hospital or healthcare facility.

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 may develop into boils or cellulitis (soft tissue infection). Most infections are mild and can be treated with antibiotics given by mouth.

Persons most at risk for CA-MRSA include prison inmates, participants in competitive sports (especially contact sports like wrestling and football), and close contacts of patients with MRSA infections. However, anyone can become infected if they come into direct physical contact with the bacteria. If you think you have a staph infection, see your doctor for evaluation and care.

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

- Cover all wounds with clean bandages, particularly those that produce drainage or pus. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions on proper care of the wound. Pus from infected wounds can contain staph, so keeping the infection covered will help prevent the spread to others. Bandages or tape can be discarded with the regular trash.
- Wash your hands often, take frequent showers, and practice good hygiene. You, your family, and others in close contact should wash their hands frequently with soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially after changing the bandage or touching the infected wound.
- Don't share towels or personal items, such as razors, combs, clothing or sports equipment that directly touches the body. Wash sheets, towels, and clothes with water and laundry detergent. Drying clothes in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, also helps kill bacteria in clothes.
- Routinely clean any exercise equipment used by others.

If these precautions are taken, there is no reason to keep students or employees at home. Small children with draining wounds may need to be excluded from daycare until their wounds heal, unless good wound care and hand-washing can be assured.

Coaches can help prevent staph infections among athletes by taking the following steps:

- Promote good hygiene, including showering and washing with soap after all practices and competitions. Make sure enough soap and hot water are available.
- Discourage sharing of towels, uniforms or other personal items.
- Establish routine cleaning schedules for all shared exercise equipment. Encourage athletes to use a clean cloth or towel between their skin and any shared sports equipment.
- Assess athletes regularly for skin infections and encourage athletes to report sores or skin wounds to the coaching staff.
- If an athlete has an infected wound that cannot be adequately covered, then the athlete may need to be temporarily excluded from contact sports until the wound stops draining.

Healthcare workers with staph infections may need to take special precautions or may even be temporarily restricted from certain patient care activities as determined by the infection control policies of their hospital or healthcare facility.

For more information, click on
http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/hip/ARESIST/mrsa_comm_faq.htm.