



MRSA in the School Setting

Community Acquired Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (CA-MRSA) infections are becoming more common. With the beginning of a new school year upon us, please be aware children, just like anyone else in the community, can become infected with this bacteria.

Staphylococcus aureus, often referred to simply as "staph," is a bacteria commonly found on the skin and in the noses of healthy people. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *S. aureus* colonizes the nostrils of approximately 30% of the population without causing disease.

S. aureus is transmitted when susceptible individuals come in contact with the bacteria, most commonly through secretions from infected skin lesions or colonized nasal discharge. Infection occurs person-to-person via direct physical contact or indirectly through contaminated objects, such as towels, sheets, wound dressings, hands, clothes or sports equipment. During the warmer months, a commonly overlooked mode of infection involves self-innoculation: picking the nose, followed by scratching a mosquito bite. Many pediatricians recommend keeping nails short on younger, often less hygienic, patients to avoid this route of infection.

When *S. aureus* gains entry into the body through a break in the skin, the infection produced is usually minor. In healthy people, *S. aureus* typically manifests as skin infections, such as pimples and boils. These may become red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. In contrast, skin infections caused by CA-MRSA are more severe and frequently require professional medical treatment for proper healing. CA-MRSA skin infections are often mistaken for spider bites due to their acute onset, localization, and excruciating pain.

Guidelines to Prevent the Spread of MRSA in the School Setting:

1. Students should avoid sharing personal items and skin care products such as clothing and balms or moisturizers.
2. Keep hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Use the 15 second rule while washing hands, this is just enough time to sing the alphabet song.
3. Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed.
4. Avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages, and wash hands immediately after changing a bandage.
5. Seek medical attention if a wound does not heal properly or appears to be infected.
6. Students and teachers should be encouraged to report known or suspected MRSA infections to the school nurse.

As CA-MRSA infections are becoming more common, awareness and prevention measures are even more important than they have been in the past. Please do your part to prevent the spread of CA-MRSA in your school system by ensuring the above guidelines. If you see a student with a suspicious lesion, advise him or her to seek professional medical treatment.