

AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION

“An Ounce of Prevention...” It’s worth a pound of cure, or so the old saying goes. As I look at the state of skin infections in wrestling though, I am hesitant to think an ounce is enough. But the cure weighs a ton, on your wallet.

Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) is a serious bacterial infection risk that has been around hospitals for many years. And now, suddenly, it is in our sport and worse yet in our state. “In January 2003, the Indiana Department of Health was notified of two wrestlers on a high school team who had MRSA skin infections diagnosed. The two athletes were in different weight groups and had never wrestled each other, suggesting that transmission could have occurred through shared items rather than direct contact.”

What is MRSA?

Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus is as it sounds, a drug resistant staph infection. It is typically associated with hospitals and other health care situations where inadequate hand washing between patients may spread infections and cause new strains to develop.

What are the signs of MRSA?

MRSA presents like any other infection. Typical signs include fever, pus, swelling, or pain in a wound. The wounds do not need to be deep, and in one case turf burns in football players contained MRSA infection.

What are the risks of MRSA?

In the CDC report cited earlier, 3 of 5 fencers in a Colorado fencing club were hospitalized and received intravenous antimicrobial therapy. In a Pennsylvania college football team 7 of 10 infected athletes were hospitalized. In a Los Angeles college football team, two players became infected, both were hospitalized and one received surgical debridement and skin grafts. This is not an inexpensive problem. Home remedies will not rid an athlete of this infection and single in office treatments are not effective.

How do we prevent MRSA?

Although it may sound like a broken record, good hygiene can prevent the occurrence and spread of any infection including MRSA. The Center for Disease Control recommends the following:

1. Cover all wounds. If a wound cannot be covered adequately, consider excluding players with potential infectious skin lesions from practice or competitions until the lesions are healed or can be covered adequately.
2. Encourage good hygiene, including showering and washing with soap after all practices and competitions.
3. Ensure availability of adequate soap and hot water.
4. Discourage sharing of towels and personal items (clothing, equipment)
5. Establish routine cleaning schedules for shared equipment.
6. Train athletes and coaches in first aid for wounds and recognition of wounds that are potentially infected.
7. Encourage athletes to report skin lesions to coaches and encourage coaches to assess athletes regularly for skin lesions.