



October 17, 2007

Dear Parents:

We are writing to inform you of a health issue that recently has received considerable attention in the media and is understandably a concern for parents. A number of school systems in the region, including Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), have reported cases of students with a bacterial infection of the skin that is resistant to the more common forms of antibiotics.

The infection is called Methicillin-Resistant Staph Aureus or MRSA. The skin condition most commonly looks like an infected pimple or boil and can worsen to include redness, warmth, swelling, pain, and discharge. It can be mistaken as a spider or insect bite. MRSA is spread by skin-to-skin contact, contact with drainage from the nose of a person infected, or contact with contaminated objects such as razors, soap, clothing, or towels.

At this time, approximately 13 MCPS students, the majority of them student athletes, have been diagnosed with MRSA. A few of the reported cases include elementary students. All have received treatment with appropriate antibiotics and are recovering.

Please be assured that MCPS and the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services are using appropriate preventive measures to limit the spread of MRSA. All principals are receiving prevention information and school nurses also are working with school staff on this issue. Schools with suspected or confirmed MRSA cases are receiving additional cleaning with a 1 to 10 bleach solution in locker rooms, weight rooms, and physical education areas. Disinfectant wipes have been provided to students for use before using weight room equipment.

You and your family can help prevent the spread of MRSA by following good hygiene practices:

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed
- Avoid contact with other people's wounds and bandages
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels or razors
- Wipe surfaces of exercise equipment before and after use

Early treatment of suspected MSRA is important. If you are concerned about a wound or sore on your child consult your health care provider. The Montgomery County Health Officer recommends that any draining sore or wound be cultured for MSRA. If you have any questions, contact the health nurse or technician at your child's school or your family physician.

Health situations such as this can cause anxiety for children and parents. As parents and educators, we want to protect our children and ensure their safety. One of the most effective things that we can do is to remain calm and positive. Our children need to know that we are dealing with this situation proactively and they are safe. Please monitor your child's feelings and behavior for any signs of anxiety. Additional information to help you support your child is available on our website at www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org.

Respectfully,

Jerry D. Weast, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Ulder J. Tilman, M.D., MPH
Montgomery County Health Officer
and Chief of Public Health

JDW:jfm

Office of the Superintendent of Schools

Have you been diagnosed with a *Staphylococcus aureus* or MRSA infection?

Below are answers to some common questions...

What is *Staphylococcus aureus* or Staph?

Staph is a type of bacteria. It may cause skin infections that look like pimples or boils. Skin infections caused by Staph may be red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. Some Staph (known as Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* or MRSA) are resistant to certain antibiotics, making it harder to treat. The information on this page applies to both Staph and MRSA.

Who gets Staph infections?

Anyone can get a Staph infection. People are more likely to get a Staph infection if they have:

- Skin-to-skin contact with someone who has a Staph infection
- Contact with items and surfaces that have Staph on them
- Openings in their skin such as cuts or scrapes
- Crowded living conditions
- Poor hygiene

How serious are Staph infections?

Most Staph skin infections are minor and may be easily treated. Staph also may cause more serious infections, such as infections of the bloodstream, surgical sites, or pneumonia. Sometimes, a Staph infection that starts as a skin infection may worsen. It is important to contact your doctor if your infection does not get better.

How are Staph infections treated?

Treatment for a Staph skin infection may include taking an antibiotic or having a doctor drain the infection. If you are given an antibiotic, be sure to take all of the doses, even if the infection is getting better, unless your doctor tells you to stop taking it. Do not share antibiotics with other people or save them to use later.

How do I keep Staph infections from spreading?

- Wash your hands often or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Keep your cuts and scrapes clean and cover them with bandages
- Do not touch other people's cuts or bandages
- Do not share personal items like towels or razors

If you have any questions about your condition, please ask your doctor.
For more information, please visit: http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa.html.

