MRSA Infections in Athletics: What You Should Know

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What is MRSA?
MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*), is a form of Staph. bacteria that is resistant to antibiotics such as methicillin, oxacillin, penicillin, and amoxicillin. Staph bacteria are one of the most common causes of skin infections in the United States. Most of these skin infections are minor (such as pimples and boils), but some can cause serious infections (such as surgical wound infections, bloodstream infections, and pneumonia)

How is MRSA spread?
Simple Staphylococcus aureus bacteria is carried in approximately 20%-30% of the population in a colonized state within the nose. Approximately 1% of the population is colonized with the antibiotic-resistant MRSA. People who carry Staph. in its colonized state do not suffer illness.

Who does MRSA effect?
MRSA most frequently infects persons with weakened immune systems such as those who are in hospitals, but within the last decade MRSA has been diagnosed more and more outside of that setting. Athletic settings are of a great concern for the spread of MRSA. They provide an optimal environment for the spread of MRSA due to five important risk factors (the "5 Cs"): 1. Crowding, 2. Frequent skin-to-skin contact, 3. Compromised skin (i.e., cuts or abrasions), 4. Contaminated items and surfaces, 5. Lack of cleanliness. In recent years a number of high school, collegiate, and professional athletic settings have battled outbreaks of MRSA. Athletes involved in contact sports have shown to be at biggest risk, especially football.

What are the symptoms of potential MRSA infection?
MRSA infection areas may appear red, swollen, painful, and may have drainage. MRSA is often misdiagnosed as an ingrown hair or spider bite. MRSA infection can lead to more serious conditions like bloodstream infection and pneumonia.

Ways to stop the spread of MRSA:
1. Clean and cover all open areas of the skin (cuts, abrasions) during practice/games
2. Thoroughly cleansing after workouts/practices
3. Launder your uniforms and other athletic clothing in hot water and dry them with a hot dryer
4. Do not share towels
5. Use liquid soap, not bar soap. MRSA has been shown to thrive on bar soap.

Other Information about MRSA:
Center for Disease Control (CDC)
www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa_ca_public.html

National Athletic Trainers Association (NATA) official statement on MRSA
www.nata.org/publicinformation/docs/MRSA_Statement.pdf