

October 29, 2007

Recently the threat of drug-resistant bacteria infecting school children has been making headlines in the news. The Illinois Department of Public Health has distributed guidelines for preventing the spread of methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus, or MRSA, in the schools. This is the variation that is resistant to most antibiotics. In the past, MRSA was most dangerous to people with compromised immune systems. Within the past ten years it has begun to surface in the regular community population, as well. At this time we are unaware of any reported cases in our school district.

Staphylococcus (or staph) bacteria are found in the nasal passages and on the skin of nearly everyone. About one third of the population carries the MRSA variety and probably doesn't know it. The U. S. Centers for Disease Control states the bacteria usually spreads via skin-to-skin contact and via personal items. Staph or MRSA infections in the community are usually manifested as skin infections, such as pimples and boils, and can occur in otherwise healthy people.

Practicing good hygiene can help reduce transmission of staph and other bacteria. Any wound should be cleansed promptly and treated appropriately. At school wounds should be covered until healed and bandages should be kept clean and dry. Showering soon after sports practices and games should be encouraged. Sharing towels, razors, clothing, jewelry, deodorant and other personal items should be avoided. Washing gym suits and uniforms on a regular basis is important, too. As with most communicable illnesses, washing hands frequently with soap or use of an alcohol-based hand sanitizer will help reduce transmission of organisms. If you notice an unusual skin condition, a persistent pustule, boil or draining wound seek medical attention and follow your healthcare provider's instructions on wound care and infection control. Please report MRSA or any other significant infections or illnesses to your child's school.

Please take a minute to review the Basic Hygiene Guidelines for the Prevention of MRSA in Schools at the website below.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

<http://www.idph.state.il.us/health/infect/hygiene.htm>