

Dear Parents/Guardians:

During the past few weeks, a great deal of media attention has been focused on communities all across the country that have experienced an increase in the number of Staph and Community Acquired Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus aureus (CA-MRSA) infections. Staphylococcus aureus, or Staph, is a common germ that many people carry in their nasal passages, under fingernails, or on their skin with no ill effects. However, given the opportunity through a scrape, cut, or break in the skin, staph bacteria can cause an infection.

As a school district, we are being proactive and implementing procedures toward the prevention and spread of Staph infections in the school setting. Greater emphasis is being placed on hand washing district-wide, hand sanitizers will be installed in each cafeteria, computer labs, and other locations that we consider high risk areas. Greater emphasis has been placed on the cleaning and sanitation of locker rooms, shower rooms, weight rooms, water fountains, and student desks. Additionally, coaches are working with the student athletes to promote behaviors that will help in the prevention of MRSA.

To assist you as parents, students, staff, and community we are providing you with the following educational information in regards to Staph and CA-Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus aureus.

### **Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA)**

#### **What is Staphylococcus aureus?**

- This bacterium, often called Staph, is one of the most common causes of skin infections in the U.S.
- Staph is usually found on the skin or in the noses of healthy people. This is called colonization.
- The majority of Staph infections are minor (pimples and boils).
- Staph can also cause more serious infections such as surgical wound infections and pneumonia that require special antibiotics for treatment.

#### **What is MRSA (Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA))?**

- MRSA is a type of Staph germ that is hard to treat with some commonly used antibiotic medicines. It has developed something called resistance, or the inability of certain antibiotics to kill the germ.
- Because of resistance, MRSA can be hard to treat and can lead to life-threatening blood or bone infections.

#### **What does MRSA infection look like?**

- It is often misdiagnosed as a spider bite.
- Symptoms may include redness, warmth, swelling, pus, skin tenderness, pimples, boils or blisters.
- MRSA-infected skin lesions (sores) can change from skin or surface irritations to abscesses or serious skin infections.
- If left untreated, MRSA can infect blood and bones.

#### **How is MRSA spread?**

- MRSA lives on skin and survives on objects and surfaces for more than 24 hours.
- Drainage (pus) from skin sores can spread bacteria to other body parts or to other people.
- MRSA infections can be found in places where there are crowds of people such as schools and gyms.
- MRSA is almost always spread by direct, physical contact.

- MRSA is also spread through touching objects such as towels, sheets, workout areas and sports equipment that has MRSA germs on them.

#### **How do I know for sure that I have MRSA?**

- A sample of the infected wound is used to grow the bacteria in the microbiology laboratory. This is called a culture.
- Once the MRSA are growing, they are tested to see which antibiotics will be effective for treating the infection.
- If the Staph germs that were cultured cannot be killed with standard antibiotics then the infection is called MRSA.

#### **What kind of treatment can I get for my MRSA infection?**

- Many MRSA infections can be treated by draining the abscess or boil and may not require antibiotics.
- **Only healthcare providers should drain sores.**
- Always keep draining sores covered to prevent others from getting sick.
- Most MRSA infections are treatable with antibiotics. If your case is severe, you may need very strong antibiotics that can only be given in a hospital.

#### **How can I prevent MRSA infections?**

According to the CDC, practicing the following good hygiene will help prevent skin infections:

- Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water.
- Avoid contact with other people's wounds or anything contaminated by a wound.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as razors, towels, uniforms and sports equipment that directly touches your body.
- Clean and disinfect objects (such as gym and sports equipment) before use.
- Wash dirty clothes, linens and towels with hot water and laundry detergent. Using a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, also helps kill bacteria.
- Avoid using unnecessary antibiotics.

Early treatment of suspected Staph or CA-MRSA is important. If you, or a member of your family, have any of the signs or symptoms described in the above information, we encourage you to contact your family physician or contact the St. Francois County Health Department at 431-1947. As parents, and educators we want to do all that we can to protect our children and ensure their safety.

Again, the school is taking appropriate actions to create a safe environment for all students. We are providing this information as a precautionary procedure in hopes it may help you better recognize the symptoms and signs of MRSA, which may ultimately prevent a serious situation from occurring in the future.

Central Administrative Staff  
Central Nursing Staff