

GILES COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
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Dear Parent / Guardian:

Due to recent news media coverage regarding skin infections, this letter is to provide you with factual information about the situation, and what it means for students, parents, and staff at Giles County Public Schools. *Staphylococcus aureus* (or “staph”) bacteria are commonly found on human skin and in nasal passages. Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (or “MRSA”) is a form of staph that has developed some resistance to commonly-used antibiotics. All forms of staph, including MRSA, are most commonly transmitted by direct skin-to-skin contact, and introduced into the body through a break in the skin, such as a cut or a scrape. These illnesses are present in our community, and have been for years. We’ve all become much more aware of them recently, and this awareness gives us the opportunity to educate ourselves about the risks of infection, and ways to prevent its spread and protect ourselves.

Giles County Public Schools has two laboratory confirmed cases of MRSA. To our knowledge, both students have been treated by a physician. We are taking all the precautionary hygiene measures to clean the schools and athletic team locker rooms. This practice has taken place since the beginning of school and will become a regular practice throughout the school year at all schools. We are following guidelines set by the Virginia Department of Health and will continue to implement proper hygiene protocol as directed by the Health Department.

Staph bacteria are one of the most common causes of skin infections. While up to 30% (estimated) of us carry these bacteria in our noses, only about 1% (estimated) of us carry MRSA. Staph is not considered an “airborne” bacteria and therefore spreading should not be expected to occur by sitting in a classroom with an infected individual or from passing them on the street. Most infections are spread by material from another person’s wet or draining infections that get on a break in someone else’s skin. This is why it is very important to cover any infection with a bandage to help prevent other people from contracting the germs that are in the draining infection. The illnesses caused by MRSA are the same as those caused by other staph, but they are treated differently. MRSA can occur in people who have direct or skin-to-skin contact with a person carrying the bacteria or by touching objects contaminated with MRSA (e.g., clothes, towels, bedding, athletic equipment, benches in saunas or hot tubs, bandages). Symptoms include redness, warmth, pus and a wound that does not heal, with the sores often being mistaken for “spider bites”.

One of the best ways to protect yourself against MRSA and other skin infections is by practicing good hygiene and covering up exposed cuts and wounds.. There are many effective ways that are recommended for minimizing the risk of skin infections, with some being listed below:

- Wash your hands often, especially when exposed to someone with an infection or when you touch objects that may be contaminated.

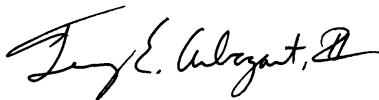
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, sports equipment, razors, water bottles, etc.
- Shower after any contact sports or after working out in a public facility, change into clean clothes and wash practice or workout clothes after each use.
- Children that have draining wounds that cannot be easily contained by dressings should be excused from sports participation and in some cases should be kept home from school until the draining stops or is easily contained, particularly if MRSA infection is known or suspected.
- If a sore or cut becomes red, oozes, causes pain or isn't healing, see a doctor.
- Don't insist on antibiotics for colds or other viruses.
- If prescribed antibiotics, take all the pills, even if you feel better before they are all gone.
- Report any suspicious wounds to the coach, athletic trainer, or school nurse immediately.

While thoroughly cleaning the school environment is important and helpful for many reasons, it does not reduce or eliminate the need to practice these good health habits. These remain important for everyone, all the time!

In otherwise healthy people, most minor wounds, even infected ones, will heal on their own and do not need antibiotics. Wounds can be helped to heal by keeping them clean, changing dressings when they become soiled and, if needed, periodically applying a dry heat compress over the dressing. If you have a wound that is not healing or you think you have a staph or MRSA infection, contact your health care provider. Most often your doctor will want to culture the wound to identify the germ. Wound cultures are becoming increasingly important so doctors can identify what is causing an infection that is not healing well on its own. Sometimes your doctor may recommend an antibiotic but many of these infections will heal themselves without antibiotics as long as any pus is drained and good hygienic wound care is practiced.

If you are interested in obtaining additional information on MRSA, it can be found on the Virginia Department of Health's Web site at: <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/Epidemiology/factsheets/Methicillin.htm>. If you have any questions, please let us know.

Sincerely,



Dr. Terry E. Arbogast, II
Division Superintendent

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