

## MRSA

MRSA has become a “four lettered word”. Not really, but it certainly can upset many parents these days. What is it? Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus. No wonder we abbreviate it. Basically this is a bacterium that has evolved in a manner that allows it to survive basic penicillin antibiotics. There has been much media hype and fear promoted about this bacterium. There are actually different strains of this bacterium. There are some that are only sensitive to a very potent IV antibiotic, but fortunately, the majority are still sensitive to several other antibiotics.

As with any infection prevention is a key to staying healthy. This bacterium is spread by contact. The skin usually provides the first line of defense. Injuries to this barrier can be the entry point for the germ. Even minor scrapes should be addressed with local care including cleaning the area thoroughly and covering the open skin with protective bandaging. The use of topical antibiotics as a preventative measure is controversial, but may provide some protection in a dirty wound.

Serious cuts with bleeding are usually dealt with aggressively on the field, but often minor scrapes may be ignored. This is true especially if they occur under the shorts or on the lower leg beneath the socks. Parents should make sure that their children let them know of any abrasions that need to be cleaned after a game or practice. Simple soap and water with light scrubbing is the most effective way to clean the wounds. Then covering the open wound to prevent inoculation if they happen to come into contact with someone infected with MRSA.

The consequences of an infection with MRSA can be as simple as an area of superficial infection in the skin requiring topical antibiotics. More serious skin infections may require oral antibiotics. It is important to have your physician get a culture to verify which antibiotics will be effective. Nasal swabs are also being used to see if the patient is a carrier for the bacterium and will require nasal application of a topical antibiotic mupirocin. In rare cases, the infection can spread to deep tissues and even the blood stream allowing it to infect many different areas of the body. This will require aggressive IV antibiotics.

The most important message is to not panic about this bacterium, but not ignore simple abrasions and wounds that can lead to serious infections. As always good, handwashing and wound cleaning will go a long way to preventing infection with MRSA.