

Notes from the Nurse—Skin Infections

Skin infections account for up to 10% of time-loss injuries in some sports and can cause serious illness. Skin infections can be spread from one student or athlete to another. You can help protect your student and athletes from becoming sick or losing playing time due to skin infections.

Skin infections can lead to:

- Lost playing time for you student athlete.
- Scarring, sometimes on face
- Wounds or rashes that keep recurring
- Rarely, serious life-threatening infections if not treated quickly

The three most important skin infections are:

1. *Staphylococcus aureus* “Staph”
Caused by: bacteria
typically: one or more painful sores, with pus surrounded by redness, sometimes associated with fever.
2. Herpes
Caused by: virus, the same virus that causes cold sores in the mouth
Typically: one or more painful blisters with clear fluid surrounded by redness
3. Tinea “Ringworm”
Caused by: fungus
Typically: itchy, dry, red, circular patches

What are the risk factors for passing skin infections from one person to another?

- Skin-to-skin contact
- Wrestling and football are the sports with the most number of outbreaks.
- Outbreaks have been reported among participants in many other sports.
- Inadequate hand washing
- Sharing sweaty or dirty clothes, towels, or equipment.
- Breaks in the skin, sores, or open wounds particularly if they are draining fluid and are not covered by a bandage that covers the entire wound.
- Not showering after every practice or game.

When should I refer my child to a health care provider?

- Any lesion, sore, or rash on the skin you are concerned about, especially those that are red, swollen, or draining fluid.
- The student or athlete also has other signs of illness such as fever or vomiting.
- Multiple students or athletes have similar symptoms.

When should I exclude my child from school, from competition or practice?

- When the student has any concerning lesion, sore, or rash until evaluated by a health care provider.
- In general, if a student or athlete has an infection with fluid draining from the wound and participates in a sport with a lot of skin-to-skin contact, they should be excluded until the infection is healed.

How Can I prevent skin infections?

According to the CDC, here are some of the best ways to prevent skin infections:

- Wash your hands. Use soap and water or an alcohol-base hand sanitizer. Also, wash thoroughly. Experts suggest that you wash your hands for as long as it takes you to recite the alphabet.
- Cover cuts and scrapes with a clean bandage. This will help the wound heal. It will also prevent you from spreading bacteria to other people. Do not touch other people's wounds or bandages.
- Do not share personal items like towels or razors. If you use any shared gym equipment, wipe it down before and after you use it. Drying clothes, sheets, and towels in a dryer -- rather than letting them air dry -- helps kill bacteria.

If you have concerns regarding your child, please contact the School Nurse at 337-1087 ext. 8031.