

# By The Book

*Risk Management Information for Private and Charter Schools from The Hartford*

## MRSA: Implications for Schools

### Recent Headlines:

- 21 Virginia schools closed for sanitizing after 17 year old student dies of MRSA staph infection
- 80 plus New Jersey schools closed for sanitizing after Staph outbreak.
- 5 reports of MRSA staph found in Scottsdale, AZ Schools.
- 23 Kentucky schools closed for cleaning after MRSA infection discovered.

With the start of a new school year, it's not uncommon for a child to "pick up" a cold including sneezing and runny noses. We all expect that type of illness because of the close quarters in schools. What we don't expect is the spread of a more serious infection, such as MRSA.

MRSA stands for Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus. Staphylococcus aureus is also referred to as 'Staph'. While MRSA and common 'Staph' both result in infections in humans, MRSA infections are difficult to treat because the bacteria is able to withstand some commonly used antibiotics (MRSA is frequently referred to in the press as a 'Super-Bug'). Government statistics approximate that between 25% and 30% of Americans harbor 'Staph' bacteria on skin or nasal passages, only about 1% may harbor MRSA. Nonetheless, MRSA accounted for 94,360 reported infections in 2005, and as many as 19,000 Americans may have died from the infection annually.

Immature immune systems in children and the close contact children have with each other in school settings compels administrators and educators to be aware of MRSA. We would like to provide some guidance and recommendations for schools, but caution that this is

not medical advice. School health officials in conjunction with public health authorities and treating physicians should be depended on for primary guidance on all individual health issues.

Schools, because of the close proximity of students and the sharing of items, can be an ideal breeding ground for MRSA and other 'staph' infections. Common areas where MRSA and other bacteria can be found include dorm rooms because of close proximity and because beds are often used as seating areas. Locker rooms are another hot spot because of the warmth and moisture levels. Wet towels and the sharing of personal hygiene items like soap or deodorant sticks can also spread the infection. Athletes, therefore, can be particularly susceptible to these infections because they are frequently in locker rooms and may share safety equipment, lie on workout benches and are generally in very close proximity to one another.

To help improve risk control of MRSA, school officials can consider the following:

- Knowledge** – Use the resources below to understand the nature of MRSA and 'Staph' infections. Know that transmission of the infection occurs from person to person, or from contaminated surfaces, through contact with the drainage from an active infection that the infected person may not realize he or she has.

- ☑ **Recognition** – Teachers, instructors, administrators, and school health officials should be trained to recognize skin conditions that might represent a ‘Staph’ infection. These infections are frequently an open lesion of the skin; many times thought to be spider or insect bites, turf burns, or ‘pimples’. Students with any open, weeping, or pustular lesion on the skin should be immediately referred to their primary care provider for appropriate medical management.
- ☑ **Hygiene** – The primary control of these infections involves personal hygiene, specifically hand washing. Consider educating everyone on controlling the spread of disease (not just MRSA) through personal hygiene. Encourage the use of hand sanitizers in situations where water may not be readily available.
- ☑ **Sanitation** – Frequently contacted surfaces (hand rails, switches, etc.) should be frequently sanitized with an EPA registered disinfectant. Remember to use these sanitizers exactly as directed by the manufacturer. Remember to sanitize exercise equipment in-between use. Sharing of towels, bars of soap, athletic equipment, or personal protective devices (safety glasses, respirators, etc.) should be forbidden.
- ☑ **Public Health** – Through your health officers, evaluate individual cases. Students and staff with active infections generally should not require absence, assuming that the wound is covered and the bandage can completely contain any drainage. Students with active infections should be restricted from wrestling,

and potentially other contact sports, until the wound is completely healed. School employees who may need to contact the wound (physicians, nurses, coaches, trainers, etc.) need to observe universal precautions to prevent contact with drainage and need to wash hands immediately afterward even if gloves were used.

- ☑ **Preparedness** – Work with your public health authorities to plan for the eventuality of a diagnosis of MRSA in students or staff. While closure of facilities is rarely required, know what types of actions you’ll need to take and have the materials on site to implement them. Understand the reporting requirements for a diagnosis of MRSA, and have a communication plan ready if you need it.

For more information on this subject, the following websites provide useful guidance:

The US Centers for Disease Control  
<http://www.cdc.gov/Features/MRSAinSchools/>

The Connecticut Department of Public Health  
[http://www.ct.gov/dph/lib/dph/communications/pdf/ct\\_dph\\_mrsa\\_facts.pdf](http://www.ct.gov/dph/lib/dph/communications/pdf/ct_dph_mrsa_facts.pdf)

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health  
[http://www.mass.gov/dph/cdc/antibiotic/mrsa\\_school\\_health.htm](http://www.mass.gov/dph/cdc/antibiotic/mrsa_school_health.htm)

The New Jersey Department of Health  
[http://nj.gov/health/cd/mrsa/documents/camrsa\\_school\\_101205.pdf](http://nj.gov/health/cd/mrsa/documents/camrsa_school_101205.pdf)

## Contact Us!

For more information please contact your insurance agent or broker, or the nearest office of The Hartford. To receive future issues of *By the Book*, suggest topics of interest, or learn about the many ways we can work with your school, please contact:

**Name:** Kim McGowan

**Title:** Private Education Practice Manager

**E-mail:** [kim.mcgowan@thehartford.com](mailto:kim.mcgowan@thehartford.com)

**Phone:** 860-547-2109

To receive future issues of *By the Book* via e-mail, please sign up at [mb.thehartford.com/schoolnews](http://mb.thehartford.com/schoolnews).

You'll also find more information about insurance, including tools such as a jargon translator, a risk IQ test, and a protection match, on the Web at [mb.thehartford.com/schoolnews](http://mb.thehartford.com/schoolnews).

*By the Book* is brought to you by The Hartford.

---

The information provided in these materials is of a general nature, based on certain assumptions. The content of these materials may omit certain details and cannot be regarded as advice that would be applicable to all businesses. As such, this information is provided for informational purposes only. Readers seeking resolution of specific safety, legal or business issues or concerns regarding this topic should consult their safety consultant, attorney or business advisors. The background presented is not a substitute for a thorough loss control survey of your business or operations or an analysis of the legality or appropriateness of your business practices. The information provided should not be considered legal advice.

The Hartford does not warrant that the implementation of any view or recommendation contained herein will: (i) result in the elimination of any unsafe conditions at your business locations or with respect to your business operations; or (ii) will be an appropriate legal or business practice. Further, The Hartford does not warrant that the implementation of any view or recommendation will result in compliance with any health, fire, or safety standards or codes, or any local, state, or federal ordinance, regulation, statute or law (including, but not limited to, any nationally recognized life, building or fire safety code or any state or federal privacy or employment law). The Hartford assumes no responsibility for the control or correction of hazards or legal compliance with respect to your business practices, and the views and recommendations contained herein shall not constitute our undertaking, on your behalf or for the benefit of others, to determine or warrant that your business premises, locations or operations are safe or healthful, or are in compliance with any law, rule or regulation.

