



October 17, 2007

Dear Parents:

We are writing to inform you of a health issue that recently has received considerable attention in the media and is understandably a concern for parents. A number of school systems in the region, including Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), have reported cases of students with a bacterial infection of the skin that is resistant to the more common forms of antibiotics.

The infection is called Methicillin-Resistant Staph Aureus or MRSA. The skin condition most commonly looks like an infected pimple or boil and can worsen to include redness, warmth, swelling, pain, and discharge. It can be mistaken as a spider or insect bite. MRSA is spread by skin-to-skin contact, contact with drainage from the nose of a person infected, or contact with contaminated objects such as razors, soap, clothing, or towels.

At this time, approximately 13 MCPS students, the majority of them student athletes, have been diagnosed with MRSA. A few of the reported cases include elementary students. All have received treatment with appropriate antibiotics and are recovering.

Please be assured that MCPS and the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services are using appropriate preventive measures to limit the spread of MRSA. All principals are receiving prevention information and school nurses also are working with school staff on this issue. Schools with suspected or confirmed MRSA cases are receiving additional cleaning with a 1 to 10 bleach solution in locker rooms, weight rooms, and physical education areas. Disinfectant wipes have been provided to students for use before using weight room equipment.

You and your family can help prevent the spread of MRSA by following good hygiene practices:

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed
- Avoid contact with other people's wounds and bandages
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels or razors
- Wipe surfaces of exercise equipment before and after use

Early treatment of suspected MRSA is important. If you are concerned about a wound or sore on your child consult your health care provider. The Montgomery County Health Officer recommends that any draining sore or wound be cultured for MRSA. If you have any questions, contact the health nurse or technician at your child's school or your family physician.

Health situations such as this can cause anxiety for children and parents. As parents and educators, we want to protect our children and ensure their safety. One of the most effective things that we can do is to remain calm and positive. Our children need to know that we are dealing with this situation proactively and they are safe. Please monitor your child's feelings and behavior for any signs of anxiety. Additional information to help you support your child is available on our website at www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org.

Respectfully,

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Superintendent of Schools

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Office of the Superintendent of Schools