



AAP NEWS PARENT PLUS

INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Take precautions to keep infections from spreading among athletes

As the competitive fall sports season kicks into high gear, parents and coaches can step up precautionary measures to help protect young athletes against communicable and infectious diseases.

Contaminated equipment and the nature of skin-to-skin contact sports often put these athletes at an elevated risk for various infectious diseases, including community-acquired methicillin-resistant *staphylococcus aureus* (CA-MRSA), impetigo, herpes and fungal infections.

Entire school teams of wrestlers, football players and fencers have been sidelined by CA-MRSA, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In 2002, two college football players in Los Angeles were hospitalized with MRSA skin infections. The athletes reported frequent skin trauma and did not always cover their wounds when they practiced and competed. They also shared balms and lubricants.

CA-MRSA and other infections also are common in sports without direct contact, such as fencing. Protective clothing can be hot and might chafe skin, resulting in scrapes and cuts.

To avoid the spread of infectious dis-

eases among athletes, experts advise parents and coaches to ensure that players:

- receive adequate wound care and cover any skin wounds — players with wounds that cannot be covered properly should be sidelined until wounds can be covered or have healed;
- practice proper hygiene, including showering with soap and hot water after each practice or competition;
- launder uniforms and towels after each use; and
- clean and disinfect helmets, pads and other protective equipment at least once a week with a diluted bleach solution or other disinfectant according to label instructions, and allow to air-dry completely.

Coaches and schools should follow



additional precautions to avoid spread of infections, including:

- maintaining clean facilities and adequate supplies of soap and towels;
- checking playing fields for foreign objects and animal droppings;
- establishing routine cleaning schedules for shared equipment and
- properly administering first aid.

— Trisha Koriath