



FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY

12055 Government Center Parkway, Suite 927
Fairfax, VA 22035-1118



October 30, 2007

Potomac Valley Swimming
c/o Peter Nichols

Thank you for your inquiry; the recent events in Virginia and nation wide have raised public awareness of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) infections. I understand your concern and would like to provide you with accurate information related to MRSA and inform you of the measures the Fairfax County Park Authority have taken to address this issue at our RECenters.

While Staph infections, including MRSA, can be transmitted through contact with environmental surfaces, such as equipment, benches, floors, etc., they are most frequently transmitted by direct skin-to-skin contact. The first line of defense is to practice good hygiene; covering any open skin area such as abrasions or cuts with a clean dry bandage; avoiding sharing personal items such as towels or razors; using a barrier between your skin and shared equipment; and wiping surfaces of equipment before and after use.

Although it is impossible to assure a totally bacteria free environment, the Park Authority has reviewed our practices. The following infection control strategies are in place to decrease the spread of infection.

- Our custodial staff has participated in additional training to review procedure of how to properly clean, disinfect and sanitize our facilities.
- We have confirmed that the products we use to clean, disinfect, and sanitize the RECenter and equipment are EPA-registered broad spectrum microorganism-killing solution that are effective against *staphylococcus aureus*, including MRSA.
- We provide paper towels and spray bottles in the Fitness rooms that are filled with a disinfecting solution, and encourage members to wipe down surfaces and equipment before and after each use, and have posted signage to remind members of this practice.
- We assign staff to periodically inspect/clean equipment and surfaces in fitness and locker rooms throughout the day.
- We maintain the chemistry of our pools at a consistent level of disinfection that prevents the spread of pathogenic microorganisms.
- Preschool classrooms follow RECenter custodial protocols. Additionally, The Park Authority Preschools have eliminated "Dress-Up" activities from their program. Hands are washed as children and teachers arrive each morning; before and after toileting; sneezing and eating.

703-324-8700 • TTY: 703-803-3354 • ONLINE: www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks • E-MAIL: parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov



If accommodations and/or alternative formats are needed, please call (703) 324-8563, at least 10 working days in advance of the registration deadline or event. TTY (703) 803-3354

- Rental equipment such as ice skates and elbow/knee pads are disinfected after each use with an EPA-registered broad spectrum microorganism-killing solution that are effective against *staphylococcus aureus*, including MRSA.

This information is shared with you as a resource and to reassure you that the Park Authority is taking this situation seriously as the safety and well being of its members is of utmost importance. Remember, that frequent handwashing and appropriate wound care remain the primary means of preventing the spread of MRSA. Please use this opportunity to review proper handwashing with your younger family members.

Sincerely,

Charles Bittenbring
Director, Park Services Division
Fairfax County Park Authority

For additional information related to MRSA please visit these web sites:

www.vdh.virginia.gov/epidemiology/Surveillance/MRSA/Athletic_Settings_MRSA.htm?mode=printable
www.fairfaxcounty.gov/hd/comdis/staph.htm
www.cdc.gov

The following information was obtained from the Center for Disease Control.

www.CDC.gov

What is *Staphylococcus aureus* (staph)?

Staphylococcus aureus, often referred to simply as "staph," are bacteria commonly carried on the skin or in the nose of healthy people. Approximately 25% to 30% of the population is colonized (when bacteria are present, but not causing an infection) in the nose with staph bacteria. Sometimes, staph can cause an infection. Staph bacteria are one of the most common causes of skin infections in the United States. Most of these skin infections are minor (such as pimples and boils) and can be treated without antibiotics (also known as antimicrobials or antibacterials). However, staph bacteria also can cause serious infections (such as surgical wound infections, bloodstream infections, and pneumonia).

What is MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*)?

Some staph bacteria are resistant to antibiotics. MRSA is a type of staph that is resistant to antibiotics called beta-lactams. Beta-lactam antibiotics include methicillin and other more common antibiotics such as oxacillin, penicillin and amoxicillin. While 25% to 30% of the population is colonized with staph, approximately 1% is colonized with MRSA.

Who gets staph or MRSA infections?

Staph infections, including MRSA, occur most frequently among persons in hospitals and healthcare facilities (such as nursing homes and dialysis centers) who have weakened immune systems. These healthcare-associated staph infections include surgical wound infections, urinary tract infections, bloodstream infections, and pneumonia.

How common are staph and MRSA infections?

Staph bacteria are one of the most common causes of skin infection in the United States and are a common cause of pneumonia, surgical wound infections, and bloodstream infections. The majority of MRSA infections occur among patients in hospitals or other healthcare settings; however, it is becoming more common in the community setting. Data from a prospective study in 2003, suggests that 12% of clinical MRSA infections are community-associated, but this varies by geographic region and population.

What does a staph or MRSA infection look like?

Staph bacteria, including MRSA, can cause skin infections that may look like a pimple or boil and can be red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. More serious infections may cause pneumonia, bloodstream infections, or surgical wound infections.

How can I prevent staph or MRSA skin infections?

Practice good hygiene:

1. Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
2. Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed.
3. Avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages.
4. Avoid sharing personal items such as towels or razors.

Can I get a staph or MRSA infection at my health club?

In the outbreaks of MRSA, the environment has not played a significant role in the transmission of MRSA. MRSA is transmitted most frequently by direct skin-to-skin contact. You can protect yourself from infections by practicing good hygiene (e.g., keeping your hands clean by washing with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand rub and showering after working out); covering any open skin area such as abrasions or cuts with a clean dry bandage; avoiding sharing personal items such as towels or razors; using a barrier (e.g., clothing or a towel) between your skin and shared equipment; and wiping surfaces of equipment before and after use.

Are staph and MRSA infections treatable?

Yes. Most staph and MRSA infections are treatable with antibiotics. If you are given an antibiotic, take all of the doses, even if the infection is getting better, unless your doctor tells you to stop taking it. Do not share antibiotics with other people or save unfinished antibiotics to use at another time.

However, many staph skin infections may be treated by draining the abscess or boil and may not require antibiotics. Drainage of skin boils or abscesses should only be done by a healthcare provider.

If after visiting your healthcare provider the infection is not getting better after a few days, contact them again. If other people you know or live with get the same infection tell them to go to their healthcare provider.

If I have a staph, or MRSA skin infection, what can I do to prevent others from getting infected?

You can prevent spreading staph or MRSA skin infections to others by following these steps:

1. **Cover your wound.** Keep wounds that are draining or have pus covered with clean, dry bandages. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions on proper care of the wound. Pus from infected wounds can contain staph and MRSA, so keeping the infection covered will help prevent the spread to others. Bandages or tape can be discarded with the regular trash.
2. **Clean your hands.** You, your family, and others in close contact should wash their hands frequently with soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially after changing the bandage or touching the infected wound.
3. **Do not share personal items.** Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, washcloths, razors, clothing, or uniforms that may have had contact with the infected wound or bandage. Wash sheets, towels, and clothes that become soiled with water and laundry detergent. Drying clothes in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, also helps kill bacteria in clothes.
4. **Talk to your doctor.** Tell any healthcare providers who treat you that you have or had a staph or MRSA skin infection.