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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Oct. 30, 2007

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Health Officials Issue Guidelines To Prevent Staph Infections In Students, Athletes, Others

The Arizona Department of Health Services has released new guidelines to schools, athletic departments, coaches, child care centers and health care providers to help prevent the spread of staphylococcal and other skin infections.

The guidance was developed in response to increased community concerns about reports of infections, including Methicillin Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), in schools.

“Most community MRSA infections are skin infections, such as pimples or boils, which can often be treated without antibiotics,” said Dr. Rebecca Sunenshine, deputy state epidemiologist. “Only rarely does community MRSA cause serious illness, such as pneumonia or bloodstream infections, and these can be avoided with early diagnosis and treatment by a healthcare provider.”

The State Health Department does not recommend school closures due to MRSA infections. Instead, the Department is providing schools with recommendations and educational materials to reduce the risk of spreading infection.

ADHS also is convening a working group comprised of leaders in school athletics, school nurses, infectious disease experts, epidemiologists, and school leadership to promote educational efforts for parents, students, athletes, coaches and others on skin infections and how they can be prevented.

The Department already has provided schools with a variety of educational materials for parents, administrators, teachers and coaches. The materials are available on the Department’s Web site, www.azdhs.gov. Included are the letters to school administrators and parents, fact sheets, and flyers that can be downloaded. Additional information will be added as it is developed.

Staph and MRSA infections are spread primarily by touching other people who are infected. Keeping the environment clean and disinfected is important for preventing the spread of all germs.

“Regular hand washing is the best way to prevent staph transmission,” said Dr. Sunenshine. “Getting back to the basics – using soap and water, or hand sanitizer – is essential in facilities where people work, live and play close together.”

(more)

Added Sunenshine: “This also has the advantage of preventing the spread of colds and flu, which are much more common than MRSA.”

Other ways to prevent staph or MRSA skin infections:

1. Keep cuts and scrapes covered with a clean, dry bandage until healed.
2. Don't touch other people's wounds or bandages.
3. Don't share personal items such as towels, wash cloths, bar soap, or razors.
4. Don't share sports equipment. If equipment is shared, wear clothing underneath. Clean equipment and mats before and after use.
5. Avoid unnecessary antibiotics.

Any student or athlete should be encouraged to tell their parents, teacher, or coach and see a healthcare provider, if they think they have a skin infection.

Additional information is available at www.azdhs.gov.

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