

## **Fact Sheet on Skin Infections associated with Contact Sports**

### **What are skin infections?**

Skin lesions (such as boils, abrasions, rash, burns, cuts, and insect bites) can become infected by bacteria or viruses. A skin lesion that becomes infected is known as a skin infection.

### **How do I know if a skin lesion is infected?**

Generally, if the lesion is red, warm, swollen, tender, or draining fluid or pus, it could be infected.

### **How are skin infections transmitted?**

Usually, it is the bacteria on our own skin gets into a lesion and causes the infection. However, some skin infections can be transferred from person to person or through objects such as sporting equipment that touches the skin (like helmets). Skin infections are not transferred through the air or through casual contact. Classmates are unlikely to get skin infections. But the skin-to-skin contact that occurs in some sports (football, wrestling, etc.) can occasionally transfer infection from one player to another. Also, poor hygiene practices, such as sharing razors or not showering with soap and hot water following practice, can play a role.

### **What should I do if I suspect a skin infection?**

The only way to know for certain is to visit a physician. They can take a culture (to identify the organism) and prescribe antibiotics or antivirals. Be sure that all of the antibiotics/antivirals are taken correctly (do not save some for friends or other team members). Not taking all of the antibiotics can result in skin infections that are resistant to antibiotics. Notify your school athletic administration if an athlete has a skin infection. This keeps others from becoming infected.

### **What types of organisms cause skin infections?**

The most common ones are the bacteria Staphylococcus (also known as Staph), Streptococcus (also known as Strep), and the Herpes virus.

### **How serious are skin infections?**

Generally, they are not very serious and will clear up with mild antibiotics or antivirals. Occasionally, the infections are due to bacteria that have become resistant to antibiotics. These may be more difficult to treat. Also, people who are immunocompromised (who have HIV/AIDS, are undergoing cancer chemotherapy, or disease such as lupus or MS) may develop very serious complications.

**How can I prevent skin infections?**

Prevention is the best medicine in this case! Parents and athletes can do the following:

- Tell the coach if you think you have a skin infection
- Make sure that you shower with hot water and soap after every practice and competition
- Don't share towels or razors with others
- Make sure that equipment is clean and disinfected before sharing with other teammates

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Please report outbreaks to your local health department or to 1.888.EPI.UTAH