

# **Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* Infections, Among Competitive Sports Participants In--- Colorado, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Texas and Los Angeles County, 2000--2003**

Although outbreaks of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) usually have been associated with health-care institutions, MRSA is emerging as a cause of skin infections in the community. This report summarizes several reported clusters of skin and soft tissue infections associated with MRSA among participants in competitive sports and identifies possible risk factors for infection (e.g., physical contact, skin damage, and sharing of equipment or clothing). The findings underscore 1) the potential for MRSA infections among sports participants; 2) the need for health-care providers to be aware that skin and soft tissue infections occurring in these settings might be caused by MRSA; and 3) the importance of implementing prevention measures by players, coaches, parents, and school and team administrators.

## **Football Players and Wrestlers**

Clusters of MRSA infection among sports team participants were identified during September 2000 in Pennsylvania and during the fall and winter of 2002--2003 in Indiana and Los Angeles County, California. Affected persons included college and high school--aged football players and wrestlers; the numbers of infected members per team ranged from two to 10 players. During September--October 2000, CDC assisted the Pennsylvania Department of Health in an investigation of an outbreak of MRSA culture-positive skin and soft tissue infections among 10 members of a Pennsylvania college football team, seven (70%) of whom were hospitalized. All isolates from the Pennsylvania athletes had indistinguishable PFGE patterns. Several possible risk factors for infection were identified, including skin trauma from turf burns and shaving and sharing of unwashed bath towels.

In September 2002, the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services investigated two cases of MRSA skin infection among members of a college football team. Both patients were hospitalized; one received surgical debridement and skin grafts. Isolates from the two players had indistinguishable PFGE patterns. Team players reported frequent skin trauma and reported covering wounds approximately half of the time. In addition, health department staff identified the potential for spread through shared items such as balms and lubricants.

In January 2003, the Indiana Department of Health was notified of two wrestlers on a high school team who had MRSA skin infections diagnosed. Neither patient was hospitalized, and isolates were not available for PFGE testing. The two players were in different weight groups and had never wrestled each other, suggesting that transmission could have occurred through sharing items rather than direct contact. No other common exposures were identified

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