

Keep Communicable Diseases out of Your Facility!

The “Journal of the American Medical Association” reports that in 2005, approximately 94,360 people were infected with Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA), also known as staph, and 18,650 died as a result of these infections. Infections usually occur from direct contact with an infected person’s skin or an open wound in a hospital or clinical setting, but about 14% of the cases occurred in non-healthcare settings. MRSA is not the only bug making its way into non-healthcare settings that is resistant to antimicrobial drugs: Another antibiotic-resistant bacteria, Vancomycin-Resistant Enterococci (VRE), is also showing up.

The MRSA infection can also develop from exposure to countertops and other items that have been contaminated. Sports equipment, crafts materials, water bottles, and other activity equipment are not immune. Failure to keep your facility clean and well maintained can potentially expose you to liability for medical treatment and other potential damages resulting from severe skin infections.

In addition to practicing good hygiene, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommend the following:

- Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water. Observations of youth washing their hands (usually a quick 3 to 5 second rinse) indicate that youth programs could significantly reduce their communicable disease exposures by teaching the youth to wash their hands for at least 30 seconds with soap and water. Non-water (alcohol) hand foams are not nearly as effective as a good hand washing.
- Keep cuts and abrasions clean and covered with a proper dressing (bandage) until healed.
- Avoid contact with other people’s wounds or material contaminated from wounds, including towels and clothing.
- Establish regular schedules for cleaning your facility and equipment commonly used. Clean countertops, tables, sink faucets, toilets, and other surfaces daily. Clean toys at least weekly. If you suspect toys or equipment have been exposed to a potential infectious disease, clean them immediately.
- Use appropriate disinfectants for cleaning, such as: 1:100 solution of household bleach and water made fresh every 24 hours, waterless antiseptic hand cleanser (does not replace a good hand washing), 70% isopropyl alcohol, hydrogen peroxide/germicidal wipes, and soap and water if nothing else is available.
- Document your facility and equipment cleaning activities, and keep the documentation with your other important records.
- Wash linens and clothes with hot water and laundry detergent.
- Dry items in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, to help kill bacteria.

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Early recognition and reporting of potential MRSA infections helps to prevent the spread of the bacteria. If you find a suspicious skin sore or boil on a youth in your care, address your concerns with the parent immediately. Require the child see a physician before he or she returns to your facility. Your local Health Department may be able to advise you if this is an isolated incident in your area and offer additional prevention steps for your staff to take to protect themselves and other youth.

Your organization should have a written policy and procedure for responding to infectious outbreaks and epidemics, including confidentiality; re-admittance; parent communications; decontamination; and medical testing/treatment of staff, volunteers, and youth.

Additional information regarding procedures to avoid staph and other infectious diseases is available through the Center for Disease Control (CDC) website www.cdc.gov.

You may want to talk with your insurance agent about possible coverage for decontamination, staff and youth medical testing and treatment, and other expenses should a governmental authority close your facility in the event of a communicable disease outbreak.

If you have a safety or risk management question or a suggestion for a topic, please contact Markel's Risk Management Department at safety1st@markelcorp.com.