

Proper hygiene is an essential part of wrestling programs. If consistent measures are not taken to provide a clean, hygienic environment, athletes have a greater risk of disease and infection. [Herpes Gladiatorum](#) (a strain of *Herpes Simplex 1*, commonly called *Wrestlers' Herpes*) is but one communicable disease that can be transmitted by body-to-body contact or contact with infected surfacing and equipment in sports. The [National Federation of State High School Associations Sports Medicine Advisory Committee](#) has helped establish guidelines to educate the sporting and medical reduce the transmission of sports-related infectious diseases¹:

1. **Shower immediately after each practice or competition.** Use your own bottled soap, clean towel, and other toiletries, and do not share them with others. Studies have shown that transmission of infectious diseases can occur when these items are shared with other athletes.
2. **Don't share water bottles.** Viruses and bacterial infections can be easily transmitted via a shared bottle.
3. **Don't perform cosmetic shaving.** Needless shaving of the chest, legs, or genital areas has been associated with increased outbreaks of Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcal Aureus (MRSA). Consider cropping or closely trimming the areas if necessary.
4. **Wash equipment on a routine basis.** Workout clothing should be washed after each practice. Consider cleaning smaller pads (for knees or elbows) weekly or, if soiled with contaminated material, daily. Larger pads, such as those in hockey or football, should be disinfected (1:100 solution of household bleach and water) routinely and more frequently if soiled with blood or bodily fluids. Commercial equipment utilizing detergents or ozone for decontamination could also be considered.
5. **Don't let abrasions or open sores go without evaluation by your coach, Certified Athletic Trainer (ATC), or healthcare professional.** Be sure to keep them clean and covered with proper dressings.
6. **Require students to inform their coach or ATC about any suspicious lesion at the beginning of practice.** Consider withdrawal from practice or competition until the lesion is evaluated by your health care provider (HCP). If it is considered infectious, wait to return to competition until cleared by your HCP. Also, have other teammates evaluated for such lesions and cared for in the same manner.
7. **Don't use a whirlpool or common tub with open wounds, scrapes, or scratches.**
8. **Shower before using whirlpools or common tubs.**

What to Do with an Infectious Outbreak

As with any skin infection, treat the individual and remove them from competition and practice. All players should be screened for similar infections daily. If possible, work with one health care provider in your community. Continuity of medical care is of the utmost importance in managing these infections. If suspicious, culturing these infections will be necessary to ensure the proper antibiotics are used. If multiple outbreaks develop on a team, i.e., clusters, contact your local public health department for assistance. Multiple outbreaks could indicate there are carriers for the bacteria on the team. Work with

your local public health and school administration to determine if having health care professionals obtain nasal cultures on all team members, including coaches, to determine who these carriers are is appropriate. Follow-up treatment may include treating all infected and carrier individuals with antibiotics. Other teams may need to be notified if an outbreak occurs after a competition.

Use of Disinfectants and Cleaners on Equipment

This is an important step in your team's hygiene protocol. Make sure the disinfectant you use kills the following, according to the bottle label: *Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)*; *Herpes Simplex Type 1*; *Streptococcus Faecalis*; *Streptococcus Salivarius*; *Staphylococcus Aureus*; and *Trichophyton Mentagrophytes*.

Ensure the entire wrestling mat surface remains damp with the proper ratio of disinfectant solution for the contact/dwell time listed. This is a vital step in the disinfecting process. The EPA requires each manufacturer to specify this contact time on the product's label for the listed organisms to be killed. If you pre-mix the solution, be aware of its life expectancy and discard old mixtures that have expired.

When the disinfectant is taken from a large container and put into a smaller bottle, ensure important labeling information is kept with each bottle. An all-in-one cleaner/disinfectant tested for wrestling mats can be used.

Wrestling Gear

Include all wrestling gear and bags in your team's overall hygiene protocol. The soles of wrestling shoes, headgear, knee sleeves, and pads should be cleaned and disinfected daily. All other equipment should be washed (laundered) before re-use.

Athletic Mats

Keep wrestling mats in good repair. Any rips/tears should be repaired according to the manufacturer's recommended procedures. Germs can migrate through the rips in the mat to the foam padding beneath, potentially perpetuating problems. Several companies can professionally resurface or repair torn or cracked mats. Wrestling mats should be cleaned/disinfected before each use.

Wall Mats

Check to ensure that wall mats are also in a state of good repair. Use a mechanical sprayer to apply the disinfectant if indicated on the product label. Spray the wall mats following the label instructions.

Locker Rooms & Weight Rooms

Locker room showers, floors, and benches should be cleaned daily using a disinfectant/cleaner. Weight room equipment should be disinfected after each use. This can be accomplished with a spray bottle containing a disinfectant cleaner.

Universal Precautions

Those coming in contact with infected athletes and potentially infected equipment need to follow universal precautions. Wear gloves and properly dispose of or process all items that come into contact with body fluids and open cuts or sores. Hands must be washed before and after working with athletes.

For questions about recommendations or issues addressed in this article, please feel free to contact our Risk Services Department at 206-394-9737 or riskservices@wsrmp.com.

Additional Resources

- The WA Department of Health, Seattle & King Co. Public Health, Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, and the Infectious Diseases Society of Washington collaborated on a toolkit titled [“Guidelines for Evaluation & Management of Community-Associated Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus Skin & Soft Tissue Infections in Outpatient Settings.”](#) It was developed for schools to help prevent and stop or reduce the spread of Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) skin infections, C. difficile, and other multidrug-resistant organisms (MDRO) in middle and high schools. It contains educational materials targeted at the school health teams, athletic directors/coaches, custodians, athletes/students, and parents.
- [National Federation of State High School Associations General Guidelines for Sports Hygiene, Skin infections, and Communicable Diseases.](#)
- The Center for Disease Control (CDC) has information for [Coaches and Athletic Directors regarding infectious skin diseases such as MRSA.](#)
- The Center for Disease Control (CDC) [Resources for Environmental Cleaning & Disinfecting for MRSA.](#)
- [National Athletic Trainers' Association Position Statement: Skin Diseases](#)
- Learn more about skin infection by viewing the [NWCA Skin Infection Webinar.](#)

ⁱ “Prevention Key to Reducing Skin Infections in High School Wrestling” National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Sports Medicine Advisory Committee, December 2015