

October 26, 2007

Dear USM Community:

There has been increasing public attention paid to the staph infection known as community-acquired methicillin-resistant staphylococcus infection. This infection is commonly referred to as MRSA, or “mersa” for short. University Health and Counseling Services thought you would find it helpful to have some background information regarding this infection.

USM has had two known recent cases of MRSA on campus, both of which are being treated and are under control. We have been in close contact with the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, and officials there have assured us that we are doing what is appropriate to manage any cases of infection on our campus.

It is important to remember this bacteria has been around for years. In fact, a recent report indicated that there is an annual average of 111 cases in Maine. Here at USM, it is not unusual for us to see several cases each year. Most cases can be successfully treated with antibiotics but there are some invasive strains that can be difficult to treat.

Education and good hygiene, along with a standard, daily cleaning of facilities, are the most effective tools we have to fight this infection. Consequently, we have outlined below preventive measures which all of us should practice.

People are more likely to get an infection if they have:

- **Skin to skin contact** with the hands, wound drainage, or nasal secretions of a person who is infected or colonized with MRSA.
- **Openings in their skin** such as cuts or abrasions.
- **Poor hygiene.**
- **Participate in contact sports.**

Signs and symptoms of a skin infection:

- **Site is red, swollen and painful.**
- **Area is warm to touch**
- **Fever**
- **Purulent drainage (pus)**
- **May look like a spider bite, pimple or boil.**

HANDWASHING IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO PREVENT DISEASE!

Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 15 seconds (or use an alcohol-based sanitizer):

- **Before** preparing food, eating or drinking.
- **After** sneezing, blowing or touching your nose.
- **After** using the toilet.
- **Before and after** a game or practice.
- **Before and after** touching and/or caring for a break in the skin.

- **After** touching things other people touch, such as phones, door knobs, or shopping carts.

Please see www.mass.gov/dph/cdc/handwashing/hw.htm for flyers that you may print and post in any public restrooms to remind you and others of these techniques. These same simple techniques will help to prevent spread of infections other than staph, such as influenza, mononucleosis and the common cold.

Other Precautions:

- **Shower** with soap and water as soon as possible after contact sports. Bathing reduces the amount of bacteria on your skin.
- **Dry** off using a clean, dry towel.
- **Do not share** equipment, towels, soap or any personal care items.
- **Do not share** ointments, creams or antibiotics.
- **Keep your hands** away from your nose, mouth and eyes. Be sure to cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in a wastebasket and wash your hands.
- **Keep all skin wounds completely covered** with a bandage, after cleaning with soap and water.
- **Wash** towels, equipment, uniforms, clothing and linens regularly.
- **Take care of yourself:** eat right, exercise, quit smoking, and decrease your stress.
- **Get medical care** at the first sign of infection in a cut – such as redness, swelling, pain or pus.
- **For more specific MRSA details:** <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/MRSAinschools>

Finally, those of us at University Health and Counseling Services would be happy to assist you with any questions or concerns you might have. Please call 780-4211 or 780-5411.

Sincerely,

Dr. Kristine Bertini
Director
University Health and Counseling