

State Health and Education Departments Issue Guidance to Schools on MRSA

Albany, N.Y. (October 25, 2007) - The State Health Department and the State Education Department today issued a health advisory to all state schools about Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus Aureus* (MRSA) and how they can prevent and reduce the risk of MRSA infections among students in schools.

Recent reports in the media of Community-Associated MRSA infections (CA-MRSA) in schools have raised understandable concerns among school officials, students, teachers and parents. It is important to note that MRSA infections are preventable and treatable, and that steps can be taken to reduce exposure to students and staff. Schools should report MRSA outbreaks to their local health department, which can provide assistance about proper infection control and prevention.

"I want to reassure the public that staph is a common bacteria present in the environment and **is not a threat to the average person**," said state Health Commissioner Richard F. Daines, M.D. "Some strains of staph are now resistant to the antibiotic Methicillin, and may cause minor to serious infections under specific conditions. **Our goal is to reduce the prevalence of these antibiotic-resistant bacteria in the community and to quickly identify and properly treat the infections.** The medical community should be on the alert to even minor infections that could be caused by MRSA and treat them properly."

"The health advisory we issued today emphasizes how important common-sense precautions like hand-washing are in reducing MRSA infections in schools," Dr. Daines said. "**Community-Associated MRSA infection is preventable and treatable.** This advisory will provide educators and parents with the information they need about how to prevent and control this increasing public health problem."

"It is critically important that schools and parents work together to prevent the spread of MRSA," said state Education Commissioner Richard Mills. "We are asking all school officers, teachers, and parents to ensure the school environment stays clean, and communicate regularly about the best ways to reduce and eliminate exposure."

The state health advisory provides information on the prevention, transmission and treatment of CA-MRSA in school settings and stresses the importance of hygiene, environmental cleaning and disinfection. The advisory is posted on the state Health Department website at: http://www.nyhealth.gov/diseases/communicable/staphylococcus_aureus/methicillin_resistant/community_associated/docs/health_advisory_2007-10-25.pdf

Staphylococcus Aureus, or "staph" bacteria is commonly carried on the skin or in the nose of healthy people. Infection occurs when staph enters through a break in the skin. While staph infections, including MRSA infections, occur most frequently among people in health-care facilities, there have been increased reports of community-associated MRSA infections.

Community-Associated MRSA outbreaks are reportable to state and local health departments and are monitored closely. The State Health Department continues to work with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the State Education Department and local health departments to ensure that proper infection control measures are instituted to prevent the transmission of MRSA.

Steps everyone can take to prevent infection include:

- Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed.
- Avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels or razors.

For more information about MRSA infections visit the CDC website at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/Features/MRSA/> and the state Health Department's website at:

http://www.nyhealth.gov/diseases/communicable/staphylococcus_aureus/methicillin_resistant/community_associated/ .

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