



COUNTY OF ONONDAGA HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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NICHOLAS J. PIRRO  
County Executive

CYNTHIA B. MORROW, MD, MPH  
Commissioner of Health

October 18, 2007

Dear Parent/Guardian,

As you may recently have heard, there have been several cases of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) reported in schools in Onondaga County. The Onondaga County Health Department (OCHD) is working with the involved schools to minimize any risk to children and to school employees. Because of the wide-spread attention to the issue, school superintendents and the OCHD feel that it is important that all families be provided with the same information about the infection and about things that you can do to prevent this infection.

*Staphylococcus aureus* (SA) is a germ (bacterium) that frequently causes skin infections. Methicillin-resistant staph aureus is a strain that is resistant to certain antibiotics. MRSA was first identified more than 40 years ago and has steadily been increasing in frequency across the country.

Staph infections are usually spread from one person to another by close skin-to-skin contact, usually through contaminated hands. Community-acquired MRSA (CA-MRSA) most commonly causes skin infections (pimple, boil, or pustule) but can sometimes also cause more significant soft tissue infections (furuncle or cellulitis). If medical treatment is indicated and an appropriate antibiotic is prescribed, almost all superficial skin infections heal. In rare cases, particularly in a person who has other medical conditions, more serious infection can occur. MRSA skin infections are usually *not* worse than typical staph infections in previously healthy school children. If you have any concerns about your child's health, you should contact your health care provider.

The simplest and most important measure to prevent the spread of staph infections is to use good personal hygiene, which consists of handwashing, proper care of skin injuries and skin infections, and avoiding sharing personal items such as razors, headgear and towels. Children who do have MRSA infections should be allowed to go to school as long as they are not ill and as long as the wound can be fully covered by bandages. Environmental clean-up is rarely indicated.

We have included with this letter the New York State Department of Health CA-MRSA fact sheets. We will continue to work with school districts to investigate outbreaks and disseminate educational materiel to curb the spread of these persistent infections.

Sincerely,

Cynthia B. Morrow, MD, MPH  
Commissioner  
Onondaga County Health Department