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## A Word About MRSA and the Public's Concerns

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) is a common staph skin infection that is resistant to some, but not all, antibiotics. The presence of MRSA in our communities is common. Life-threatening complications, however, are rare. Some important points to keep in mind are the following:

- 1) News reports have suggested that MRSA is a "super bug" that is resistant to antibiotics and will sweep through schools and communities. In fact, MRSA is a collection of different staph strains that are resistant to some antibiotics and quite sensitive to others. It is by no means untreatable.
- 2) This is not an issue about facilities (such as schools) and the perceived need to take extraordinary disinfection measures. Close contact with other people (in schools, hospitals, jails, etc.) is indeed a risk factor. There is no evidence, however, that disinfection of facilities is necessary or effective outside of certain hospital settings. Prevention of MRSA is best done through hand washing, personal hygiene, wound care, and early recognition and treatment. Environmental disinfection has a role, but it is relatively minor.
- 3) This has become a national media story. Headlines like "*MRSA more deadly than AIDS*" is probably factually true (in the US, at least), but under-plays a more significant point — more people die from common things than uncommon things. The more common Group B strep causes disease in about 18,000 people in the United States each year. Of these, about 8,000 are newborns. Group B strep is the most common cause of blood infections and meningitis in newborns and is a frequent cause of newborn pneumonia.
- 4) MRSA is here to stay, and we need to know how to minimize the threat it imposes. How can we prevent MRSA in our schools and elsewhere? Hygiene, hygiene, hygiene. Wipe runny noses, cover cuts, sores, or any open wound with band-aids, and always, always wash hands. It doesn't take anything fancy — soap and water works just fine.

To learn more about MRSA, go to the state Department of Health website at this web site: [www.doh.wa.gov/topics/antibiotics/mrsa.htm](http://www.doh.wa.gov/topics/antibiotics/mrsa.htm) or the Center for Disease Control website at [www.cdc.gov/Features/MRSAinschools](http://www.cdc.gov/Features/MRSAinschools).

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