

COASTAL HEALTH DISTRICT

“protecting and advancing the public's health”

Ways to Prevent Skin Infections in Contact Sports Athletes

There are many different causes for skin infections. Some infections can be transmitted from person to person through skin contact or through items that touch the skin. While skin infections are not usually life-threatening, they can cause lost school, work, or practice time while they are treated. **Prevention is key!**

Athletes who participate in contact sports may have an increased risk of skin infections. Organizations that sponsor contact sports (such as schools or local youth organizations) may wish to follow these guidelines to reduce the risk of skin infections in their athletes.

Early Detection and Reporting

Coaches and athletes should be trained in first aid for wounds. Sponsoring organizations should assure that coaches and athletes are taught how to recognize skin lesions that may be infectious to others. Encourage athletes to recognize and report all skin lesions to their coaches.

- Skin lesions include boils, abrasions, rash, burns, cuts and insect bites
- Skin lesions that are red, warm, swollen, tender, or draining fluid/pus are most likely to be infectious

Awareness

Any athlete with a suspect skin lesion should be excluded from practice or play until the lesions are completely healed, lesions can be completely covered by bandaging, or the player has proof from a physician that the lesion has been adequately treated and is no longer infectious.

- Coaches should check athletes for the presence of skin lesions, such as areas that are likely to be injured (i.e., skinned knees and knuckles)

Prevention

Encourage good hygiene:

- Athletes should shower and wash with soap after all practices and competitions
- Make sure that adequate soap and hot water are available (hand soap dispensers are preferred to soap bars)
- All clothing, towels, etc. should be washed in hot water (above 160°F) and dried at the high setting (above 190°F)
- Discourage sharing towels, equipment and personal items (i.e., razors, lotions, balms, lubricants, etc.)
- As much as possible, reduce sharing equipment that touches the skin (i.e., helmets, pads, body sensors, etc.)
- Shared athletic equipment such as facemasks, pads that touch the body (i.e., knee pads), floor mats, etc. should be monitored for contact with skin lesions. Disinfect equipment after each practice or competition according to the manufacturer's instructions for at least the amount of time recommended.