

MRSA

& Other Skin Infections in Athletes

What are the most common skin infections in young athletes?

RINGWORM (tinea coproris) is the most common skin infection in wrestlers. It is a fungal infection recognized by a reddish brown ring shaped lesion with a raised border that may itch slightly. Ringworm is commonly found in areas of direct contact with other people infected.

IMPETIGO is a bacterial skin infection characterized by small red pustules and scabs that may secrete thin fluid. Skin may be red, irritated, and itchy. It is most commonly found (but not limited to) on the face.

ABSCESS is a bacterial infection which causes a collection of pus under the skin. Skin is red, raised, and tender. Abscesses are most commonly found on the abdomen, pelvis, or low back.

MRSA is a bacterial infection resistant to several common antibiotics. MRSA can be recognized by tender red and irritated skin. It often looks like a pimple or abscess. Most cases heal quickly with the right antibiotic and no complication. The worrisome part is that in a few people the infection spreads rapidly. A small minority of people become so ill they need to be in a hospital. It is rarely fatal. Fortunately, prompt recognition and treatment take care of the problem!

WARTS are caused by a virus. Warts are raised, dry, scaly lesions. They usually do not itch or hurt, unless they are on the feet.

HERPES GLADIATORUM is an infection caused by the herpes simplex virus. It causes red painful blisters that itch. Sometimes fever, swollen lymph nodes, and fatigue occur. It is commonly found on the head, upper extremities, trunk, and other areas of skin contact.

SCABIES is caused by a parasite that is commonly found on fingers, toes, and in folds of skin. Scabies appear as dark lines between fingers and toes, red irritated skin, pimple like rash, sores from scratching, and severe night time itching.

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Since the Centers for Disease Control's newsletter October 16, 2007, there has been a lot of discussion about Community Associated Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (CA-MRSA). MRSA is one of many contagious skin-infecting organisms. MRSA has been around for years, but it has become popular in the media lately.

Skin infections are spread by direct contact or wounds. Bacteria and fungi live on our skin normally. Infections occur when an organism penetrates the skin, usually through a small wound. Infections also can occur when an organism our body does not recognize attaches to the skin, such as often what occurs in wrestlers.

Treatment for these skin disorders consists of keeping the affected area clean and covered. Athletes should be removed from activity until cleared by their physician. Prevention is key. Inspect your skin regularly. Shower with soap after exercise, and wash exercise clothing often. Don't let infecting organisms remain on your body, your clothes, or your equipment. Report unusual spots to your physician.

Preventive measures also include open communication among athletes, coaches, and trainers on hygiene and skin disorders. Posting an educational bulletin and having weekly skin checks are also great steps in recognizing and limiting the transmission of skin disorders. Taking these steps can help minimize the occurrence of these infectious skin disorders and prevent them from spoiling the winter sports season.

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