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MHSAA Provides MRSA Education Tools To Help Wrestling Schools Fight Infectious Disease Spread

EAST LANSING, Mich. – Dec. 19 – To help its schools – especially wrestling schools – take preventative steps to keep a strong staph infection from impacting the well being of student-athletes, the Michigan High School Athletic Association has been providing education and resources about Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus – commonly referred to as MRSA (pronounced Mer-sa).

MRSA is a type of staph infection that is resistant to certain antibiotics. These antibiotics include methicillin and other more common antibiotics such as oxacillin, penicillin and amoxicillin. Staph infections, including MRSA, occur most frequently among persons in hospitals and healthcare facilities (such as nursing homes and dialysis centers) who have weakened immune systems. However, MRSA has found its way into the community at-large recently, and the athletic community in particular.

Factors that have been associated with the spread of MRSA skin infections include: close skin-to-skin contact, openings in the skin such as cuts or abrasions, contaminated items and surfaces, crowded living conditions, and poor hygiene. Staph bacteria, including MRSA, can cause skin infections that may look like a pimple, boil or insect bite at first and can be red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. More serious infections may cause pneumonia, bloodstream infections, and destroy body tissue.

The MHSAA made MRSA education a priority at its pre-season wrestling rules meetings, a sport in which it has dealt with other communicable disease issues in the past.

“What we’ve done at our wrestling rules meeting this season is begun a fairly comprehensive education program dealing with MRSA,” said Mark Uyl, MHSAA Assistant Director. “We’re really trying to get the word out there through an education program that coaches have to be vigilant in keeping things clean, kids keeping themselves clean and their equipment clean. If a student-athlete does develop the condition, early detection to properly identify the infection then is really the key.

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“It’s something that can attack internal tissue and internal organs if it’s not detected early on,” Uyl added. “MRSA starts out looking like something as innocent as a pimple or a spider bite, and a kid will let it go for several days before seeking treatment, and then many doctors are still misdiagnosing this and prescribing an antibiotic, and MRSA is resistant to most forms of antibiotics. Now it’s three or four more days later and the condition has gotten worse and worse. Early detection is the key.”

Among the resources the MHSAA has made available are brochures and posters developed by the Michigan Department of Community Health. Both help describe how to identify MRSA, how to prevent the infection from occurring and what to do if it does occur. Both items can be downloaded from the Michigan Department of Community Health Web site, and are also available for download from the wrestling page of the MHSAA Web site.

The MHSAA is a private, not-for-profit corporation of voluntary membership by over 1,200 public and private senior high schools and junior high/middle schools which exists to develop common rules for athletic eligibility and competition. No government funds or tax dollars support the MHSAA, which was the first such association nationally to not accept membership dues or tournament entry fees from schools. Member schools which enforce these rules are permitted to participate in MHSAA tournaments, which attract approximately 1.6 million spectators each year.

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EDITOR’S NOTE – Special thanks to the Center for Disease Control Web site (cdc.gov) for information used in this release. An audio interview with MHSAA Assistant Director Mark Uyl on this topic can be found on the MHSAA Internet Broadcast Network Web site – mhsaanetwork.com – on the Dec. 19 and 26 editions of the weekly program MHSAA Perspective.

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