

Ways to Prevent Skin Infections in Contact Sports Athletes

There are many different causes of skin infections. Some infections can be spread from person to person through skin contact or by items that touch the skin. While skin infections are not usually life-threatening, they can cause discomfort, or missed days of school, work, or practice. **Prevention is key!**

Athletes who participate in contact sports may have an increased risk of having skin infections. Organizations that sponsor contact sports (such as schools or local youth organizations) should follow these guidelines to reduce skin infections among 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 or 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 written 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, such as 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 such as razors, lotions, balms, lubricants, etc.
- As much as possible, reduce sharing equipment that touches the skin, such as helmets, pads, body sensors, etc.
- Shared athletic equipment such as face masks, pads that touch the body (such as knee pads), floor mats, etc. should be monitored for contact with skin lesions. Disinfect equipment after each practice or competition according to manufacturer's instructions for at least the amount of time recommended.

Utah Department of Health

Office of Epidemiology

October, 2004

Call your local health department or

1-888-EPI-UTAH to report outbreaks of disease

For additional information: <http://health.utah.gov/epi/diseases/skininfect/index.html>