MRSA Virus
aka “Super Staph Bugs”

The following information was gleaned from an article on WebMD Health entitled 5 MRSA “Hot Spots”. Information for the WebMD article was taken from the following sources:

CDC web site. Mayo Clinic web site. WebMD Medical News: "MRSA: Experts Answer Your Questions." Gordon Dickinson MD Chief of infectious diseases, University of Miami Miami VA Medical Center. Jeff Hageman, epidemiologist, CDC.

Have you been hearing about MRSA or “super staph bugs”? Drug resistant staph germs are now known as MRSA and are responsible for two major epidemics. The largest epidemic by far is happening in hospitals and other health care facilities where patients already have a weakened immune system. Because of the patient’s weakened condition most of the deaths caused by MRSA occur in hospitals.

The second epidemic is being caused by an unrelated strain of MRSA circulating in communities and gives rise to the 5 “hotspots” mentioned in the article. Those five “hotspots” include athletic settings, military barracks, prisons, schools ---and your nose. While the virus may exist in your nose the outbreaks are often seen in areas where there is crowding, a lot of skin contact and sometimes a lack of good hygiene.

You cannot avoid MRSA by avoiding the so called “hot spots” because staph is found anywhere. One in three people carry staph on their skin and can spread infections anywhere in the community. 20% of healthy people never seem to carry staph. Up to 60% sometimes carry staph, usually in their noses and the other 20% of healthy people carry staff day in and day out, also usually in their noses. Most staph carriers carry the normal kind of staph but an increasing number carry MRSA, the drug resistant kind. Staph lives in moist areas; under the arms and in the groin but mainly inside the front of the nose.

Epidemiologists don’t understand why staph causes so much trouble. Presumably little breaks in the skin allow it to get past our barriers where it multiplies causing lots of proteins, toxins and enzymes that allow it to do a lot of damage.

How can staph be prevented? It would seem logical to keep our hands away from our noses but that is virtually impossible for most people. Therefore, good hygiene is the best preventative.

- Wash your hands thoroughly and often.
- Clean any cut or scrape and cover it with a bandage until it heals.
- Avoid contact with other people’s wounds or bandages.
- Do not share towels, razors or other personal items.
- Shower after exercise and wash your clothes and towels daily. Disinfect your gym bag after it’s come into contact with dirty athletic gear.
- Shower or bathe daily. MRSA lives on the skin but can be washed away.
• Be on the lookout for infections. Early on staph infection looks like a spider bite (a red, irritated bump). Don’t wait to seek treatment.
• If you have an infection, don’t try to squeeze it out. That only spreads the infection.

While camps are not listed as one of the hot spots we do know the campers give lots of hugs and there is often a lot of physical contact as they interact and build community. With summer clothes that’s a lot of skin contact. Also, the campers may not be careful with their towels, often throwing them on someone else’s bed or throwing them all in a pile when they go swimming.

Those of us in camping know that there are risks involved in many of the activities we do and an important part of being in leadership is minimizing risks. We ask your help in being proactive rather than reactive. Our staff will be particularly careful with maintaining good hygiene but we also need your help:
• to educate your counselors about MRSA, how it is spread and how it can be prevented
• to remind campers to wash their hands often and shower daily
• to help campers keep their towels hung up so they can dry
• to remind campers to keep sores and wounds covered, disposing of bandages properly
• to prevent campers with a wound or sore from swimming
• to be observant and report to you and the care coordinator any wound or sore that looks infected. We would rather err on the side of caution in seeking medical advice even if it isn’t MRSA

Thanks for your help in educating your staff about MRSA. While we don’t want to scare anyone; we also want to have a healthy, knowledgeable respect for the staph virus. Education, prevention and early diagnosis and treatment will all help minimize the risk. Thanks for your help in minimizing this risk in our midst.

http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/mrsa/DS00735

http://www.cdc.gov/mrsa