

Dear Parent,

As we enter the time of year when colds and flu are common, I wanted to give you some information and reminders about good health and hygiene. The media has recently focused on the spread of skin infections, especially those caused by Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA). Skin infections, like respiratory diseases, can be prevented and their occurrence reduced by using good hygiene practices.

Staphylococcus aureus, often referred to as “staph” are bacteria that are most commonly carried in the noses of healthy people. Staph bacteria are one of the most common causes of skin infections in humans. Most of these skin infections are minor and can be treated without antibiotics. Some need to be treated with inexpensive antibiotics. Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) is a staph infection that is resistant to antibiotics. MRSA spreads easily through direct contact with people or contact with MRSA contaminated surfaces. Most infections occur when staph that is already on the skin enters through a break or cut on the skin or when broken skin is in contact with MRSA contaminated objects such as shared athletic equipment, clothing or towels. Contaminated hands can also transfer MRSA to cuts or scraps on the skin. Staph is not usually passed through the air.

According to the California Department of Public Health, hand hygiene by washing hands with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer is the single most important measure that can be taken to prevent the spread of skin infections, colds and flus. Covering your mouth or nose when you cough or sneeze and then washing your hands can help control the spread of germs. Hands should be clean before they touch the eyes, mouth, nose or any cuts or scraps to the skin. Any wound to the skin should be covered with clean, dry bandages. Personal items such as towels, washcloths, clothing and sports uniforms should not be shared. Good hygiene is the best preventative medicine.

If you have any questions or would like more information, you can call the Sonoma County Department of Public Health at 565-4400 or visit the California Department of Public Health website at www.cdph.ca.gov.