

Saint David's Health News

Volume 4, Issue 2, November/December, 2007

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Dear Parents,

This issue of *Saint David's Health News* is devoted to two issues of concern within our school community.

The recent media focus on **Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA)** has raised questions about the risks, methods of transmission, and ways of preventing what is actually a common pediatric skin infection among the school-age population. The adjoining article will address some of these questions and hopefully alleviate your concerns.

In light of the approaching holiday season, it is important to consider the children with allergies at Saint David's by carefully reviewing the *Nut Awareness* guidelines on Page 2 prior to bringing in any special treats.

Please feel free to contact me with your questions and concerns. I wish you a joyous Christmas and a happy, healthy New Year!

My best,

Annie Haddad

METHICILLIN RESISTANT Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA)

www.cdc.gov, www.mayoclinic.com, www.nyhealth.gov

1. What is Staphylococcus aureus?

Staphylococcus aureus (staph) is a bacterium that is typically found on the skin or in the nose of approximately 20% of the population. It is not normally life-threatening for healthy individuals.

2. What is methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA)?

MRSA is a strain of the bacteria Staphylococcus aureus that is resistant to many of the broad-spectrum antibiotics commonly used to treat staph infections. MRSA has existed in health care settings for years; in the early 1990's it began to appear in the general population, due in part to the overuse and misuse of antibiotics.

3. How is MRSA spread?

MRSA is spread through direct skin-to-skin contact with wounds, cuts, or abrasions, or by sharing personal items such as towels, and razors. **The risk of transmitting MRSA in a classroom setting is very low.**

4. What are the symptoms associated with MRSA?

A staph infection may first appear as a reddened area on the skin, or may resemble a pimple or boil that can be red, painful, swollen, or have a pus-like drainage. Fever may develop as the infection worsens.

5. Is MRSA treatable?

Staph infections are treated by keeping the infected area clean and covered with a sterile, dry bandage. Antibiotics may be prescribed if necessary. MRSA is usually easily treated with one of many other available antibiotics.

6. How can your family prevent MRSA?

- **Careful, thorough hand washing** with soap and water or with alcohol-based hand sanitizers is the best defense against germs. **Remind your children to wash their hands frequently!**
- **Avoid sharing personal items** such as towels, sheets, soap, and clothing.
- **Check your skin regularly** for any reddened areas, pimples, or boils causing pain, swelling, or pus.
- **Keep any wounds clean and covered** with a dry, sterile dressing.
- **Avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages.**
- **Use antibiotics as prescribed.** Take all of the doses, even if you're feeling better.
- **Closely monitor any wounds or cuts for signs of infection**, and see your physician to determine if treatment is required.
- **Athletes** should avoid sharing towels and equipment that is in direct contact with skin, and should shower after games.
- **During games and practices** skin wounds should be covered with a clean, dry bandage.

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NUT AWARENESS AT SAINT DAVID'S

A number of students at Saint David's have peanut and/or tree nut allergies. These students may not ingest or touch anything containing tree nuts or peanuts, and are at high risk of having a life-threatening anaphylactic reaction if they are accidentally exposed to these allergens.

Because of the severity of these allergies, Saint David's has heightened its *Nut Awareness*.

- **We ask that all food brought into the building be peanut, tree nut, and nut oil free.** This includes sack lunches eaten during tutoring and music lessons and sack lunches for field trips, as well as snacks purchased before the *After School Program*. Please see the list of "Tree Nuts" from the F.D.A. in the lower right corner.
- **We ask that all food brought into the school building be approved by the School Nurse.** This includes foods for snacks, ethnic and holiday celebrations, and all birthday parties. To guide you when choosing foods that do not contain peanuts or tree nuts, the School Nurse has available a list of "*Safe Snacks*." Please stop by her office to pick up a copy. As ingredients may change, however, please read the label on all packaged food items at the time of purchase.
- **Please be aware that foods from store bins are *not considered safe*.** There is a high risk of cross contamination from the bins and scoops.
- **When bringing homemade items to school**, such as cupcakes and cookies, please avoid using peanuts, tree nuts or nut oils. Cross contamination must be avoided by thoroughly washing all cooking equipment, utensils, and cutting boards in hot, soapy water prior to use. Wiping or rinsing is not sufficient to remove allergen residue.
- **When using pre-packaged items or packaged mixes**, please read every label carefully. If it includes the words "May contain traces of..." or "Made on equipment that processes or manufactures..." or "Made in a facility that also manufactures..." it is *not considered safe*. Many brands contain trace levels of peanuts and tree nuts.
- **When ordering cupcakes or cookies from a bakery**, please be certain that there are no peanuts, tree nuts or nut oils used in the preparation. Please talk to the bakery employees about preparation of the item.
- If you are interested in purchasing edibles for children with allergies, **the following websites offer food items that are tree nut, peanut, dairy, egg, or wheat free:**

www.gakssnacks.com
www.enjoylifefoods.com
www.nothinnutty.com
www.divvies.com

Saint David's cannot ensure an environment that is completely free of peanuts and/or tree nuts. But if we all heighten our awareness of the problems that such foods,

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS AT SAINT DAVID'S

When planning your son's birthday celebration at school, please note the following so that we can best prepare for his special day:

If you would like a birthday cake to be prepared by the Food Service and served at lunch, please call the kitchen and place the order at least 5-7 business days in advance.

If your child's birthday celebration is to take place in the classroom, cupcakes and cookies made at home or purchased from a bakery are permitted. Please remember that all food brought into the school needs to be checked by the School Nurse. Please also remember to follow the Saint David's *Nut Awareness* guidelines.

Please contact Annie Haddad if you have any questions about Saint David's *Nut Awareness* guidelines or birthday celebrations at school. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation with helping us maintain a healthy and safe school environment for the boys with allergies.

F.D.A. LIST OF TREE NUTS:

Almonds	Hickory nut
Beechnut	Lichee nut
Brazil nut	Macadamia nut
Butternut	Pecan
Cashew	Pine nut
Chestnut	Pistachio