



# GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR SPORTS HYGIENE, SKIN INFECTIONS AND COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)  
Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC)

Proper precautions are needed to minimize the potential risk of the spread of communicable disease and skin infections during athletic competition. These conditions include skin infections that occur due to skin contact with competitors and equipment. The transmission of infections such as Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) and Herpes Gladiatorum, blood-borne pathogens such as HIV and Hepatitis B, and other infectious diseases such as Influenza and COVID-19 can often be greatly reduced through proper hygiene. The NFHS SMAC has outlined and listed below some general guidelines for the prevention of the spread of these diseases.

## Universal Hygiene Protocol for All Sports:

- Shower immediately after every competition and practice, using liquid soap and not a shared bar soap.
- Wash all workout clothing after each practice, washing in hot water and drying on a high heat setting.
- Clean and/or wash all personal gear (knee pads, head gear, braces, etc.) and gym bags at least weekly.
- Do not share towels or personal hygiene products (razors) with others.
- Refrain from full body and/or cosmetic shaving of head, chest, arms, legs, abdomen, and groin.
- Students should clean hands with an alcohol-based gel or soap and water before and after every practice and contest to decrease bacterial load on the hands.
- Covering up coughs and sneezes in the bend of the elbow instead of the hand
- Stay home from school and athletic participation if frequent cough, diarrhea, vomiting, or fever.

## Infectious Skin Diseases

Strategies for reducing the potential exposure to these infectious agents include:

- Students must notify a parent/guardian and coach of any skin lesion prior to any competition or practice. An appropriate health-care professional must evaluate all concerning skin lesions before returning to practices or competition.
- If an outbreak occurs on a team, especially in a contact sport, all team members should be evaluated to help prevent the potential spread of the infection. All shared equipment shall be properly cleaned/disinfected prior to use.

- Coaches, officials, and appropriate health-care professionals must follow NFHS or state/local guidelines on “time until return to competition.” Participation with a covered lesion may be considered if in accordance with NFHS, state or local guidelines and the lesion is no longer contagious.

### **Blood-borne Infectious Diseases**

Strategies for reducing the potential exposure to these agents include following Universal Precautions such as:

- A student who is bleeding, has an open wound, has any amount of blood on a uniform, or has blood on their body, shall be directed to leave the activity (game or practice) until the bleeding is stopped, the wound is covered, the uniform and/or body is appropriately cleaned, and/or the uniform is changed before returning to activity.
- Athletic trainers or other caregivers must wear gloves and use Universal Precautions to prevent blood or body fluid-splash from contaminating themselves or others.
- In the event of a blood or body fluid-splash, immediately wash contaminated skin or mucous membranes with soap and water. Skin antiseptics (e.g., isopropyl alcohol) or moist towelettes may be used if soap and water not available.
- Clean all contaminated surfaces and equipment with disinfectant before returning to competition. Be sure to use gloves when cleaning.
- Blood on an opponent’s uniform during competition or teammate’s uniform during practice should be cleaned at that time by wiping with a disinfectant such as isopropyl alcohol.
- Any blood exposure or bites to the skin that break the surface must be reported and immediately evaluated by an appropriate health-care professional.

### **Other Communicable Diseases**

Means of reducing the potential exposure to these agents include:

- Make certain that students, coaching staff, and medical staff are current on all required vaccinations (MMR, Hepatitis B, Chickenpox, Meningitis, Hepatitis A). COVID-19 vaccine and yearly influenza vaccine are strongly encouraged.
- During times of outbreaks, follow the guidelines set forth by the CDC as well as State and local Health Departments.

For more detailed information, refer to the "Blood-Borne Pathogens," "Common Illnesses" and "Skin Conditions and Infections" sections contained in the NFHS Sports Medicine Handbook.

## **January 2022**

**2018**

**2015**

**2012**

**2010**

### **DISCLAIMER – NFHS Position Statements and Guidelines**

The NFHS regularly distributes position statements and guidelines to promote public awareness of certain health and safety-related issues. Such information is neither exhaustive nor necessarily applicable to all circumstances or individuals and is no substitute for consultation with appropriate health-care professionals. Statutes, codes or environmental conditions may be relevant. NFHS position statements or guidelines should be considered in conjunction with other pertinent materials when taking action or planning care. The NFHS reserves the right to rescind or modify any such document at any time.