

Sports Hygiene – Guidelines to Minimize Infectious Diseases

Position Statement and Guidelines National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Sports Medicine Advisory Committee

Preparation for competition in any sport requires proper training and practice. Proper preparation is necessary, whether it means preparing your body or maintaining your equipment. Keeping your body and equipment clean is part of that process. Infectious diseases do propagate and are easily transmitted in the sports environment. Contact sports and those with heavy equipment are more prone than others, but needless to say, proper hygiene is necessary for all sports to reduce the potential of transmitting these agents. The NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee realizes these issues and has helped establish guidelines to educate the sporting and medical community about their presence and means to reduce transmission of sports-related infectious diseases.

Proper Hygienic Practices

1. Shower immediately after each practice or competition. Use your own bottled soap and towel, and don't share them with others, let alone other toiletries. Studies have shown that transmission of infectious diseases can occur when these items are shared with other athletes.
2. Don't share water bottles. Viruses and bacterial infections can be easily transmitted via a shared bottle.
3. Don't perform cosmetic shaving. Needless shaving of the chest or legs or genital areas has been associated with increased outbreaks of Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcal aureus (MRSA). Consider cropping or closely trimming the areas if necessary.
4. Wash equipment on a routine basis. Work-out clothing after each practice. Consider washing smaller pads (for knees or elbows) every week or, if soiled with contaminated material, each day. More prominent places, such as hockey or Football, should be disinfected (1:100 solution of household bleach and water) regularly. More frequently if soiled with blood or bodily fluids. Commercial equipment utilizing detergents or ozone for decontamination could also be considered.
5. Don't let abrasions or open sores go without evaluation by your coach or Certified Athletic Trainer (ATC). Be sure to keep them clean and covered with proper dressings.
6. Inform your coach or ATC about any suspicious lesion at the beginning of practice. Consider withdrawal from practice or competition until the lesion is evaluated by your Health Care Provider (HCP). If it is considered infectious, wait to return to competition until your HCP has cleared it. Also, have other teammates evaluated for such lesions and cared for in the same manner.
7. Don't use a whirlpool or cold tub with open wounds, scrapes, or scratches.
8. Shower before using whirlpools or common tubs.

Following these guidelines will help reduce the occurrences and outbreaks of infectious diseases. This will take the active participation of the coach, parent, and athlete. This will create a healthy environment that will allow the athlete to compete and reduce the risk of being sidelined.