



Sports Medicine for Student Athletes

The Importance of Good Hygiene

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Practicing good hygiene is an important part of athletic endeavors. Without taking proper care of yourself and your equipment, you run the risk of contracting a skin infection. Skin infections can range from viral to fungal to bacterial infections. All of them require medical attention and will cost you time away from athletic participation.

The most common form of viral skin infection is herpes gladiatorum. This is one of the most infectious of the herpes-caused diseases and is mostly contracted through skin to skin contact.

Herpes gladiatorum is caused by the herpes simplex virus and is often characterized by a cluster of fluid filled blisters that can appear up to a few weeks after initial contraction. Herpes viruses should be treated by oral antiviral medications prescribed by a physician that can be taken once a day while the infection is present or prophylactically every day to suppress future outbreaks.



Impetigo is the most common form of a bacterial skin infection among contact athletes. Impetigo is classified by a sore that is sometimes fluid filled and forms a honey colored scab. The sores may not be painful but are often itchy. Touching or scratching sores may easily spread the infection. This skin infection can be treated by either topical ointments or oral antibiotics that need to be prescribed by a physician.



Dermatophytosis, more commonly known as ringworm, is a common fungal skin infection that is often seen in athletics. Ringworm is characterized by raised red bumps that are usually in circular form. This fungal infection thrives mostly in environments that are warm, dark, and moist. Ringworm can be treated by an over the counter steroidal cream and in severe cases, may need a prescription from a physician.



Each of these skin infections can be prevented with just a few easy steps.

- + Always remember to shower with soap and water after activity
- + Never share items such as soap, towels, and razors. Remember to wash towel regularly
- + Wash hands regularly with soap and water
- + Wear clean clothes each day for practice
- + Practice and competition gear such as protective padding should be cleaned daily with bleach wipe or any other cleaning material
- + Make sure to trim your nails to avoid cutting yourself and others
- + Never pick or squeeze skin sores as the drainage can be very infectious

All athletes with skin sores or lesions should be referred to a physician for evaluation and possible treatment. These individuals should not participate in practice or competition until the lesions have healed or are no longer infectious and can be properly covered for athletic participation. Remember to err on the side of precaution, if you are unsure about how something looks, get it checked out!

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