

# Skin Infections in Athletes

Skin infections account for up to 10% of time-loss injuries in some sports and can cause serious illness. Skin infections can be spread from one athlete to another. You can help protect athletes from becoming sick or losing playing time due to skin infections.

## The three most important skin infections are:

### *Staphylococcus aureus* “Staph”

- **Caused by:** bacteria
- **Typically:** one or more painful sores, with pus surrounded by redness, sometimes associated with fever



### Herpes

- **Caused by:** virus, the same virus that causes cold sores in the mouth
- **Typically:** one or more painful blisters with clear fluid surrounded by redness



### Tinea “Ringworm”

- **Caused by:** fungus
- **Typically:** itchy, dry, red, circular patches



## Skin infections can lead to:

- Lost playing time
- Scarring, sometimes on face
- Wounds or rashes that keep recurring
- Rarely, serious life-threatening infections if not treated quickly

## What are the risk factors for passing skin infections from one person to another?

- Skin-to-skin contact
  - Wrestling and football are the sports with the most number of outbreaks
  - Outbreaks have been reported among participants in many other sports
- Inadequate hand washing
- Sharing sweaty or dirty clothes, towels, or equipment
- Breaks in the skin, sores, or open wounds particularly if they are draining fluid and are not covered by a bandage that covers the entire wound
- Not showering after every practice or game

## When should I refer an athlete to a health care provider?

- Any lesion, sore, or rash on the skin you are concerned about, especially those that are red, swollen, or draining fluid
- The athlete also has other signs of illness such as fever or vomiting
- Multiple athletes have similar symptoms

## When should I exclude an athlete from competition or practice?

- When the athlete has any concerning lesion, sore, or rash until evaluated by a health care provider
- In general, if an athlete has an infection with fluid draining from the wound and participates in a sport with a lot of skin-to-skin contact, they should be excluded until the infection is healed

## When can I allow an athlete to return to competition or practice?

- Consult with the athlete’s health care provider and specific sports league rules

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## Prevent the spread of infections!

Athletes' responsibilities	Coaches, Officials, and Team Leaders responsibilities
1. Report all sores or concerning skin problems to a coach, athletic trainer, school nurse, or other health care provider. Tell she/he that you participate in sports.	1. Observe the athletes for skin problems. Encourage and support athletes to report sores, lesions, and rashes. Refer them to a health care provider if concerning.
2. Before and after skin-to-skin contact athlete: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wash your hands with soap and running water for 15-20 seconds or,</li> <li>Use alcohol-based hand rub if hands are not visibly dirty</li> </ul>	2. Promote good hand washing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Athletes: before and after skin-to-skin contact</li> <li>Coaches and officials: before and after contact with each athlete</li> </ul>
3. After being checked by a health care provider, completely cover all sores, lesions, rashes, and wounds with a water-proof bandage so no fluid can drain from it. Change the bandage if it become wet.	3. After being checked by a health care provider, ensure all sores, lesions, rashes, and wounds are covered by a water-proof bandage that prevents any fluid draining from the wound before and during participation.
4. Do not share water cups or bottles.	4. Ensure athletes have access to bottles or cups that are not shared.
5. Shower immediately after every practice and game <i>before</i> going home. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use warm water and liquid soap</li> <li>Use only your own towels, razors, or wash clothes and do not share them with others</li> </ul>	5. Ensure athletes shower immediately after every practice and game <i>before</i> going home <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure that showers are functional with warm water and liquid soap available</li> <li>Ensure that towels, razors, or wash clothes are not shared</li> </ul>
6. Never share sweaty or dirty towels or clothing. Launder all towels or clothes after each wearing according to label directions.	6. Ensure provided towels, uniforms, or clothing are laundered and dried after each use according to label directions.
7. Use clean personal equipment such as pads, head gear, etc.	7. Assist in the cleaning of all personal equipment such as pads, head gear, etc. per manufacturer's instructions.
8. Follow coach's instructions for cleaning and disinfection of shared equipment such as mats.	8. Develop and implement cleaning and disinfection protocols for all shared equipment such as mats.

For more information see: [www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/dtopics/athlete/](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/dtopics/athlete/)