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FROM: Robert Graham, DO, MPH, Medical Director, Mid-Michigan District Health Department

MRSA warning

ITHACA/STANTON/ST JOHNS~ Recent reports about staph infections by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the rare death of an otherwise healthy individual from a staph infection have raised local concerns.

MRSA (Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*), pronounced “MER-SA”, is caused by the bacteria *Staphylococcus aureus*. MRSA is a form of a staph infection that cannot be controlled by routine antibiotics.

“*Staphylococcus aureus* is just about everywhere and on everything,” said Dr. Robert Graham, Medical Director for Mid-Michigan District Health Department. “Everyone that has ever had a scrape or a cut has probably had a staph infection,” Graham noted. “Many years ago, your mom took care of these infections with soap and water and maybe some merthiolate (a mercury containing substance that was once widely used as a germ-killer).”

Staph infections, including MRSA, generally start as small red bumps that resemble pimples, boils or spider bites. These can quickly turn into deep, painful abscesses that require surgical draining. Sometimes the bacteria remain confined to the skin. But they can also burrow deep into the body, causing potentially life-threatening infections in bones, joints, surgical wounds, the bloodstream, heart valves and lungs.

Rarely, an otherwise healthy person will get a staph infection that spreads to many parts of the body. Most commonly, staph infections occur in people who are in poor health or live in group settings like nursing homes.

The best way to avoid getting a staph infection, including MRSA, is to wash your hands and keep surfaces and clothing clean. Dr. Graham offers these guidelines for all settings including schools, day care centers and the health care field:

- Allow students time to wash their hands. Hand washing at the beginning of the day, before eating and after recess will decrease the risk of getting or spreading germs of all types.
- Provide students, teachers, and health care providers with waterless hand cleaner if soap and water are not available.

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- Use single-use paper towels or hot air hand dryers after washing your hands.
- People should use their own towel. Towels should not be shared by anyone.
- Gym clothes and towels should be laundered in the hottest tolerable water with soap and dried in the hottest tolerable dryer setting. Gym equipment should also be cleaned frequently.
- Clean frequently touched surfaces, such as doorknobs and door handles, with hot soapy water.
- Use warm soapy water to clean a minor cut or scrape. More serious cuts and injuries should be examined and treated by a doctor.
- All draining wounds should be kept covered.
- Generally speaking, people with a staph infection should wait 2 to 4 days after starting treatment to return to school or work.
- Use antibiotics wisely. Take all of a prescribed antibiotic as directed by your doctor. Don't take someone else's antibiotics.

Please contact MMDHD with any questions at the numbers listed below or visit www.mmdhd.org.

Montcalm County: 989-831-5237

Clinton County: 989-224-2195

Gratiot County: 989-875-3681

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