

So clean you could eat off it

MSU trainers keep the locker rooms cleaner than most kitchens to prevent MRSA and other nasty germs. *by Karen Giles-Smith*

In one of the treatment rooms in the Duffy Daugherty Football Building at Michigan State University, Brian Bratta and I pulled chairs up to the exam table, using it like a conference table. I didn't think twice: The place was pristine.

Bratta, a certified athletic trainer and clinical coordinator of athletic training at MSU, explained the prevention protocols put in place by MSU's athletic program long before a form of MRSA, or methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, started spreading through sports teams.

MRSA is a type of bacteria that's resistant to certain antibiotics. One form of MRSA has been a problem in hospitals for many years. Another form called community-associated MRSA affects young, healthy people. It spreads by contact with infected skin or personal items.

Community-associated MRSA often enters the body through a cut or abrasion. It usually forms a small red bump that resembles a pimple, boil or spider bite which can quickly turn into a deep, painful abscess. MRSA can cause serious skin and soft tissue infections, dangerous forms of pneumonia and even death.

Controlling the spread of MRSA through prevention is key. MSU's athletic program plays offense against MRSA and other pathogens by following guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

"The main thing is cleanliness," says Bratta. The guidelines include methods to help ensure that athletic facilities, equipment, clothing and athletes are kept clean and that athlete's wounds are treated and kept covered and contained. Since the outbreak of community-associated MRSA, the MSU athletic clinic has stepped up prevention efforts by providing a travel-size container of antimicrobial antiseptic skin cleanser to athletes who have cuts or abrasions.

To make it easier for athletes to follow the CDC guidelines, MSU takes care of the athlete's clothes and equipment. After every practice and game, the athletes hand in their equipment and uniforms or practice clothes and



Brian Bratta, MSU clinical coordinator of athletic training, sprays an exam table with a surface disinfectant/decontaminant to kill MRSA and other pathogens. Photo by Alyssa Bernardi.

MSU employees clean and disinfect the equipment and wash and dry the clothing at specific temperatures.

"Some of the athletes would rather hang their shirts in the locker room to dry overnight and then wear them again the next day," says Bratta. "We tell them no."

And the athletes understand the reason for the rules. When freshmen athletes get their physicals, they also receive a "drug and alcohol talk" and a "cleanliness talk." This is when they're told about the importance of hand washing or using hand sanitizer, keeping wounds covered, showering after participation and before treatments (such as hot tubs, cold tubs, stretching and icing) and not sharing personal items like towels, razors, clothing and athletic equipment.

No athletes at MSU have ever contracted MRSA, no doubt due in large part to the stringent sanitation protocols MSU's athletic program follows. The public can take similar steps to help prevent MRSA in the community.

For more information:

Mayo Clinic: www.mayoclinic.com/health/mrsa/DS00736

WebMD: www.webmd.com/skin-problems-and-treatments/understanding-mrsa-methicillin-resistant-staphylococcus-aureus

CDC: www.cdc.gov/hcidds/thq/ar_MRSA_ca_public.html

The CDC recommends the following steps to help protect community members from MRSA:

- Wash your hands.
- Don't share personal items.
- Keep cuts and abrasions clean and covered with sterile, dry bandages until they heal.
- Shower immediately after athletic games or practices.
- Sit out athletic games or practices if you have a suspicious infection.
- Sanitize towels and bed linens if you have a cut or sore.
- Wash gym and athletic clothes after each wearing.
- If you have a skin infection that requires treatment, ask your doctor if you should be tested for MRSA.
- Follow physician's instructions for proper antibiotic use.

How to wash your hands: Scrub hands briskly and thoroughly with soap and warm water for at least 15 seconds, rinse under running warm water, then dry with a disposable towel and use another towel to turn off the faucet. Carry a small bottle of hand sanitizer containing at least 60 percent alcohol for times when you don't have access to soap and water.