

Herpes Gladiatorum (Mat Herpes): A Fact Sheet

Herpes gladiatorum is a skin infection caused by the herpes simplex virus. This skin infection is spread by direct skin-to-skin contact. Sports that involve close contact with *herpes gladiatorum* lesions may spread this infection to other athletes. Generally, lesions (sores) appear within 8 days after exposure to an infected person, but in some cases it may take longer to appear. Good personal hygiene and thorough cleansing and disinfecting of all equipment are essential to helping prevent the spread of this and other skin infections. All athletes with skin sores or lesions should be referred to a physician or primary care provider for evaluation and possible treatment. These individuals should not participate in practice or competition until their lesions have healed. Before skin lesions appear, some people have a sore throat, swollen lymph nodes, fever or tingling on the skin. Herpes gladiatorum lesions appear as a cluster of blisters and may be on the face, arms, legs or trunk. Seek medical care immediately for lesions in or around the eye.

Herpes gladiatorum infections can recur. The virus can "hide out" in the nerves and reactivate later, causing another infection. Generally, recurrent infections are less severe and don't last as long. However, a recurring infection is just as contagious as the original infection, so the same steps need to be taken to prevent infecting others.

- Personal hygiene for athletes is essential.
- Shower at school immediately after practice, using soap and water.
- Always use your own plastic bottle of liquid soap. Use your own soap and towel.
- Wash towels after each use, using hot water and detergent (and bleach if possible), dry on high heat setting.
- Equipment and gear should be clean.
- Practice and competition gear should be cleaned every day.
- Headgear should be cleaned daily with a bleach wipe or any other cleaning material.
- Clean towels should always be used.
- Good hygiene is essential to preventing infection with *herpes gladiatorum*.
- Hands should be cleaned often! At least 15 seconds washing should be done using soap and warm water. An alcohol-based hand rub can be used instead of soap if their hands are not visibly soiled.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with your hands.
- Clean your hands before and after practice and competitions.
- Never pick or squeeze skin sores; drainage is very infectious.
- Always report any skin lesions or sores to your athletic trainer or coaching staff immediately, whom in turn should notify teams that they have wrestled in the 8 days prior to an outbreak of *herpes gladiatorum* and notify/consult with their school physician immediately so that a treatment plan can be started.

Cleaning and disinfecting the environment is also important in preventing infection with *herpes gladiatorum*. Disinfectants approved by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) must be used according to manufacturer recommendations (viricidal, fungicidal, bactericidal) OR bleach solution (800 ppm = ¼ c bleach: 1 gallon water). Mix daily to be effective. Mats should be washed after every practice session or competition. Locker rooms and shower areas should be cleaned and disinfected daily using EPA-approved product or bleach solution.

Sources and/or additional resources:

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Health: http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/steps_to_a_healthier_pa/14181/preventing_skin_infections_in_athletes/556727

Allegheny Health Dept.: <http://www.achd.net/factsheet/mat.html>

If you are a registered Millersville University student and you have questions or you need to make an appointment, please call Millersville University Health Services at 871-5250.