Proper hygiene is as important in wrestling as training and practice. Wrestling is an activity that runs the risk of disease and infection if measures are not taken to provide a clean, hygienic environment. Herpes Gladiatorum (a strain of Herpes Simplex 1 commonly called Wrestler’s Herpes) is but one communicable disease that can be transmitted by body-to-body contact or contact with infected surfacing and equipment in sports. The NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee realizes these issues and has helped establish guidelines to educate the sporting and medical community about their presence and means to reduce transmission of sports related infectious diseases:*

1. Shower immediately after each practice or competition. Use your own bottled soap and towel and don’t share them with others, let alone other toiletries. Studies have shown that transmission of infectious diseases can occur when these items are shared with other athletes.

2. Don’t share water bottles. Viruses and bacterial infections can be easily transmitted via a shared bottle.

3. Don’t perform cosmetic shaving. Needless shaving of the chest, legs or genital areas have been associated with increased outbreaks of Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcal aureus (MRSA). Consider cropping or closely trimming the areas if necessary.

4. Wash equipment on a routine basis. Work-out clothing should be washed after each practice. Consider washing smaller pads (for knees or elbows) on a weekly basis or, if soiled with contaminated material, each day. Larger pads, such as those in Hockey or Football, should be disinfected (1:100 solution of household bleach and water) on a routine basis; more frequently if soiled with blood or bodily fluids. Commercial equipment utilizing detergents or ozone for decontamination could also be considered.

5. Don’t let abrasions or open sores go without evaluation by your coach or Certified Athletic Trainer (ATC). Be sure to keep them clean and covered with proper dressings.

6. Inform your coach or ATC about any suspicious lesion at the beginning of practice. Consider withdrawal from practice or competition until the lesion is evaluated by your Health Care Provider (HCP). If it is considered infectious, wait to return to competition until cleared by your HCP. Also have other team mates evaluated for such lesions and cared for in the same manner.
7. Don’t use a whirlpool or common tub with any open wounds, scrapes or scratches.

8. Shower before using whirlpools or common tubs.

What to Do With an Infectious Outbreak

As with any skin infection, treat the individual and remove them from competition and practice. All players should be screened for similar infections on a daily basis. If possible, work with one health care provider in your community. Continuity of medical care is of the utmost importance in managing these infections. If suspicious, culturing these infections will be necessary to ensure the proper antibiotics are being used. If multiple outbreaks develop on a team, i.e. clusters, contact your Public Health Department for assistance. Multiple outbreaks could indicate there are carriers for the bacteria on the team. If present, consider having HCPs obtain nasal cultures on all team members, including coaches, to determine who these carriers are. With a contact sport, consider treating all infected and carrier individuals with antibiotics.

Use of Disinfectants and Cleaners on Equipment

This is an important step in your team’s hygiene protocol. Make sure the disinfectant that you use kills the following, according to the bottle label: Human Immunodificiency Virus (HIV); Herpes Simplex Type 1; Streptococcus Faecalis; Streptococcus Salivarius; Staphylococcus Aureus; and Trichophyton Mentagrophytes.

Make sure the entire wrestling mat surface remains damp with the proper ratio of disinfectant solution for the contact/dwell-time listed. This is a vital step in the disinfecting process. The EPA requires each manufacturer to specify this contact time on the product’s label for the listed organisms to be killed. If you pre-mix the solution, be aware of its life expectancy and discard old mixtures that have expired.

When the disinfectant is taken from a large container and put into a smaller bottle, make sure important labeling information is kept with each small bottle. An all-in-one cleaner/disinfectant tested for wrestling mats can be used.

Wrestling Gear

All wrestling gear that is used on a daily basis should be included in your team’s overall hygiene protocol to ensure that it is clean and potentially germ free. The soles of wrestling shoes, headgear, knee sleeves and pads should be cleaned and disinfected daily. All other equipment should be washed (laundered) before re-use.
Athletic Mats

Wrestling mats should be in a state of good repair. Any rips/tears should be repaired according to the manufacturer’s recommended procedures. Germs can migrate through the rips in the mat to the foam padding beneath, potentially perpetuating problems. There are several companies that can professionally resurface or repair torn or cracked mats. Wrestling mats should be cleaned/disinfected one hour prior to your team’s use.

Wall Mats

Check to make sure that wall mats are also in a state of good repair. If so indicated on the product label, use a mechanical sprayer to apply the disinfectant. Spray the wall mats in accordance with label instructions.

Locker Rooms & Weight Rooms

Locker room showers, floors, and benches should be cleaned daily using a disinfectant/cleaner. Weight room equipment should be disinfected after each use. This can be accomplished with a spray bottle containing a disinfectant cleaner.

Universal Precautions

Coaches, volunteers, athletic trainers and student trainers coming in contact with infected athletes need to follow universal precautions. Gloves need to be worn. All items that have come in to contact with body fluids and open cuts or sores need to be properly disposed of. Hands must be washed before and after working with athletes.