

Skin Infection Prevention Tips

Skin infections are caused by three different sources:

1. **Fungus** (most common is Tinea)
 - Causes ringworm, jock itch, athlete's foot, and infected nails
2. **Bacteria**
 - Causes Staph, impetigo and MRSA
3. **Virus**
 - Causes Herpes and warts

Background Info:

Our skin surface is made up of our own unique balance of these three sources. This is called our normal flora. When our flora is out of balance and/or our skin becomes damaged, these sources have a chance to become infections.

Showering immediately after practice sounds like a simple enough way to prevent skin infections, but did you know that if you go straight to the shower and only use an antibacterial soap, you could be promoting the growth of fungal infections?

--Antibacterial soaps do just what they state- they kill bacteria. This is great when we want to protect ourselves from just bacterial infections. This is not great when we are also exposed to fungal and viral infections, which happens in wrestling

--Antibacterial soaps strip away the bacteria that keep the balance of our normal flora leaving behind fungal and viral infections to flourish. The bacterium on your skin are needed to compete for space with the fungi to create your normal flora.

Showering tips for wrestlers and fighters:

--Do not lather directly under the flow of water. Lather and allow soap to remain on skin momentarily before rinsing off. Lather twice if exposed to a source.

--You may use a loofa (mesh sponge) but not too vigorously. Vigorous scrubbing will cause small abrasions to the surface of the skin allowing penetration by the sources of infection.

--Wash the back of the neck and hairline thoroughly! The collar tie is responsible for the overabundance of skin infections found here. Our hands touch everything in the wrestling room including the mats, our bodies, our opponent's body and anything else you might pick up. Nail cuts, scratches from headgear, and contacting infections on opponents frequently happen here. Everything collected by our hands is transferred to the back of our opponent's neck. Wash this area twice.

--Do not share towels and wash towels after each use. Make sure to dry off thoroughly.

The wrestling room and mat are your training and battle grounds. Here are a few tips that can help keep the room clean and you and your teammates free of infections:

--Carry your wrestling shoes to practice. When leaving the room for water or bathroom breaks wipe your shoes on the mat cleaning towel before stepping back onto the mat.

--Change your shirt often during practice. Once a shirt becomes soaked in sweat it becomes permeable. Your sweat becomes a vehicle for infections to pass through your clothing and onto your skin.

--Wear a thick cotton t-shirts or clothing made of synthetic fibers that "wick" the sweat away from the body, helping to keep the skin dry.

--Do not train with partners who have skin infections and do not train if you yourself are infected. Notify a coach immediately.

--Cover and treat any trauma to the skin including, cuts and scrapes. Always apply an antibiotic ointment or healing slave before covering for added protection and recover when it comes off while training.

--When leaving the room always, always, always, consider yourself contaminated-because you are. Shower immediately and properly. If a shower is not available use body wipes to hold you over until you can shower. But always shower as soon as possible. Make it a point to show quickly.

--Have clean clothes every day. Use a trash or grocery bag for your dirty clothes. Do not put dirty clothes in your workout bag or you'll be spreading infections and have a contaminated bag. This will put infectious material on your clean clothes the next day, and then on your partner and everyone else in the room.

--Wash your dirty clothes frequently instead of leaving them dirty for days. Do not leave clean clothes around the house or in piles in your bedroom. Fungus and bacteria are everywhere and can be spread from one wrestler that keeps a dirty room, to another wrestler that may be the cleanest.

Battling skin infections is more than just topical. Diet can play a huge role in how healthy our skin is and healthy skin is harder to infect. Here are a few diet and skin care tips:

--Keep your skin hydrated. Dry skin is more prone to infection due to numerous small cracks. Drink plenty of water every day. If you are cutting weight and restricted water the final day before weigh-ins, applying lotion to the skin will help keep it moist. Use lotion after showering to prevent drying of skin.

--Eat whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables and lean protein rather than sugary or fat laden foods. Keep a balanced diet even when cutting back and your body will be more effective at fighting the sources.

--Rest to increase your body's resistance. You will catch infections easier if you are worn down, tired, or don't get enough sleep.

Once infected, proper care is required to rid you of the infection and promote healing.

--Do not touch the infection. Wash your hands immediately if you do touch an infection.

--Consult your coaches or physician with all possible infections. The sooner you treat an infection the less established it will be. The infection will be easier to clear up, creating less damage to the skin.

--Use medicine completely and as recommended. The infection may still be present even though it may not be visible. Selson Blue dandruff shampoo has been shown to help fight fungus in the hair.

--Use the proper medication for each infection. Using the wrong medicine may make the infection worse. (example: using cortisone creams on fungal infections helps the fungus grow)

Above all else, if you're suspicious about anything, ask a coach immediately. Groom check yourself after every shower, use the mirror to check your back, and ask parents/siblings to check behind your ears and other areas you can't see. Prevention and quick discovery of infections is the best possible route to take.