



Herpes gladiatorum

School health and childcare provider information

Cause

Herpes simplex virus type 1 (HSV-1).

Symptoms

The most obvious symptom is a cluster of blisters (fluid-filled bumps) on exposed areas of the body (typically the head, neck, and shoulders). Fever, sore throat, swollen lymph nodes, or burning or tingling of the skin may be present in the 24 hours before the blisters appear. Blisters will eventually scab and crust. Once infected, HSV-1 remains in the body in an inactive state until reactivation results in recurring infections throughout life. While recurrent infections are usually less severe, a recurring infection is just as contagious as the original infection. Infected individuals may have no symptoms.

Seek medical care immediately for lesions in or around the eye.

Spread

Extremely contagious by skin-to-skin contact during athletic competition involving close physical contact and frequent skin abrasions (e.g., wrestling, rugby). Abrasions and other skin conditions increase the chance of getting the infection. Saliva of persons may also contain the virus and even people without symptoms can spread it to others. Surfaces and objects like mats, floors, locker room surfaces, equipment, and clothing are unlikely to spread the infection.

Herpes gladiatorum may also spread from mother to baby during childbirth.

Incubation

It takes from 2 to 14 days, usually 8 days, from the time a person is exposed for the first time until symptoms develop.

Contagious period

Most often while blisters and sores are present and unhealed. However, people without symptoms may also be contagious.

Exclusion

Contact Sports

Exclude from practice and competition until all sores are dry and scabbed. Treatment with oral medication may shorten exclusion time. Follow the health care provider's recommendations and specific sports league rules for when an athlete can return to practice and competition.

Treatment

Recommend parents call their child's health care provider. Antiviral medications can shorten the duration of infection. They are not effective after blisters have opened.

Prevention

Coaches and trainers should:

- Examine athletes for undiagnosed rashes, blisters, or sores on exposed areas of the body and around the eyes or mouth before practice or competition.
- Check the specific sports league rules for when an athlete can return to practice and competition.
- Instruct athletes to report blisters and/or sores.
- Instruct athletes to report any burning or tingling if it occurs at the site of a prior *herpes gladiatorum* infection.
- Ensure proper hygiene measures below:

Showering

- Athletes should shower at school after practice or competition, using liquid soap and water.
- Athletes should have their own plastic bottle of liquid soap.
- Athletes should have their own towel. Do not allow anyone to share towels.
- Wash towels after each use, using hot water with detergent (and bleach if possible) and drying on a heat setting.

General hygiene

- Recommend athletes clean their hands often. Scrub hands for at least 15 seconds using soap and warm water. An alcohol-based hand sanitizer may be used if hands are not visibly soiled.
- Have athletes clean their hands before and after practice and competitions.
- Encourage athletes to avoid touching their eyes, nose, or mouth.

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- Do not allow picking or squeezing of skin sores. The drainage is very infectious.
- Encourage athletes to report any sores or skin lesions to coaching staff immediately.

Equipment and clothing

- Change practice and competition clothing every day.
- Clean headgear daily with the same liquid soap using for showering.
- Clean equipment daily according to manufacturer's directions.

Cleaning and disinfection

- Have and use written procedures for cleaning and disinfecting.
- Wash mats after every practice or competition.
- Clean and disinfect locker rooms and shower areas daily.
- Launder mop heads and cleaning cloths daily using laundry detergent in hot water. Mop heads must air dry or be dried completely in a dryer on a high heat setting between uses.

Schools should have written procedures in place for cleaning and disinfection of the environment. Always use an EPA-approved disinfectant (viricidal, fungicidal, bactericidal) according to manufacturer recommendations or bleach solution (800 ppm), see Section 2 of this manual.

For more information, call Hennepin County HSPHD-Epidemiology at (612) 543-5230 or call your local health department.

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