

Clovis Unified steps up staph-infection fight

District using mat solution, literature to increase wrestlers' awareness.

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By Margaret Slaby / The Fresno Bee

In an attempt to fight the spread of staph infections, the Clovis Unified School District announced Tuesday it will use a new antibacterial treatment on all wrestling mats and fitness equipment in its schools.

The district will use SportsAide, a solution that inhibits harmful bacteria, mold and fungi growth for a minimum of one year.

In addition, the district will distribute pamphlets to raise awareness about the role prompt showering and washing of workout gear plays in avoiding dangerous outbreaks.

School officials in the central San Joaquin Valley became concerned when staph infections and other skin diseases increased two years ago. The skin-to-skin contact and sweaty, moist environment in wrestling creates a breeding ground for bacterial infections such as staph and viruses such as herpes.

"Treating our facilities with a long-lasting antimicrobial product is another proactive thing that Clovis Unified can do to stay in front of the threat of bacterial outbreaks," said Dennis Lindsey, Clovis Unified's director of co-curricular programs.

Clovis West wrestling coach Brad Zimmer said his program "hasn't had too many issues -- just a couple here and there."

"If we do contract it, it's after a tournament," Zimmer said. "When we're here, we have them go in and shower right after, we require them to come in with clean clothes. We talk to the kids about [hygiene] all the time."

Zimmer said there also are periodic skin checks and that the mats are mopped before and after practice with a disinfectant. The new treatment is mopped on to create a barrier after the mats are scrubbed.

Clovis West athletic director Joe Aiello said that in addition to mopping wrestling mats, the school's weight and fitness equipment is wiped down several times a day with a disinfectant.

Clovis High interim wrestling coach Ben Holscher said his program hasn't experienced any problems this season but that in the previous two a few cases of ringworm occurred after the team traveled to tournaments.

"We've never had any problem in our room," he said.

"This new antibacterial is a very good thing, but it's not all of a sudden we have this magical thing and we're not going to have a problem. We mop our mats every day twice a day. Our kids wash their clothes every day. We talk to the kids. We give them information that talks about different kinds of soap. We inform parents about things to look for [regarding skin infections]."

Dr. Kathleen Behr, a Fresno dermatologist, said that every year during wrestling season she sees a slight increase in skin infections.

"In wrestling there's just so much skin-to-skin contact," she said. "I think it's both a combination of that and the mats. And they just need to really take showers, use antibacterial washes, clean their clothes and get checked earlier rather than later if they have any symptoms."

Staph infections can first appear as a red irritation on the skin, similar to a spider bite. If untreated, staph can develop into a life-threatening infection. Other skin infections that affect wrestlers are less dangerous but can be disfiguring. They include ringworm, impetigo (skin blisters), cellulitis, dimple warts and herpes gladiatorum.