

## Schools overreacting to MRSA, says GISD

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SWARTZ CREEK -- When a student is confirmed to have the antibiotic-resistant bacteria MRSA, schools should:

- A. Close school
- B. Disinfect the school
- C. None of the above

Some area superintendents -- whose response to cases locally have varied -- may have been surprised to learn the answer is C, according to Dr. Gary Johnson, medical director for the Genesee County Health Department, who spoke to administrators at their monthly meeting on Wednesday.

"It's not the kind of thing you close school over," said Thomas Svitkovich, Genesee Intermediate School District superintendent, who attended the meeting.

Swartz Creek is the fifth school district to publicly acknowledge that a student has been diagnosed with MRSA, Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus.

Superintendent Jeff Pratt said the district's cleaning regime has been stepped up, likely permanently, but not entirely because of MRSA.

"It's part of our due diligence," Pratt said. "We have to assume at any given time we have an individual with a staph infection. All the cleaning regime is based on us always having a case."

The district learned of the case Nov. 2. Before the case was reported, Pratt said the district sent information to parents reminding them of the importance of hand washing in stopping germs from spreading.

The district's response is in contrast to other school's responses to the staph infection in recent weeks. Atherton closed one day last week because of a suspected case, Kearsley sent students home early and Owosso closed one day because of suspected cases. Lapeer schools disinfected its building after a case was reported there.

"I don't know why the hysteria or panic," said Johnson, who said he stressed to administrators the importance of covering open sores and wounds. "...You don't have to clean your building or use extraordinary cleaning methods."

MRSA is a staph infection that is resistant to most antibiotics. It isn't a reportable disease, unlike chicken pox and mumps, meaning school districts rely on parents and students to inform them of the infection.

"The interesting thing, it's not a reportable disease," Svitkovich said. "In the health world, it's not a big deal."

Pratt said in the one case reported to the district this year -- four cases were reported in the district in the past year -- officials confirmed the diagnosis and student's ability to return to school with their

physician.

"On virtually all of these, we're at the mercy of whether mom and dad want to report it to us," Pratt said.

"We're not health officials. That's why we're relying on what doctors and health experts tell us what to do and that's what we're going to do."

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