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Morris health program targets bacterial infections

Plan seeks to educate those at risk, track people with drug-resistant strain

*By Michael Daigle
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A committee of the Morris Regional Public Health Partnership has begun a program to target and educate county residents who are most susceptible to infections caused by an antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria.

The communicable disease committee plan is designed to identify those residents who could be most exposed to the bacteria known as Community Acquired Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus, or MRSA.

It also will track existing cases and start an education program aimed at educators, parent and caretakers, school nurses, coaches, gym teachers and children's athletic and exercise instructors.

The program will target children in sports and other physical activities where early identification, education and prevention can help reduce MRSA incidents, the committee said.

Prevention effort

The program is an effort to get out front on the prevention of any MRSA outbreak, limit the exposure of others, and educate all concerned, said George Van Orden, Hanover's health officer.

Staph infections can look like minor skin ailments like spider bites, pimples or boils, but if left untreated can become serious and can be transmitted to others.

Some staph bacteria have become resistant to traditional antibiotics and are harder to treat.

Last year MRSA cases were reported at several schools and colleges statewide, including County College of Morris, Centenary College and Fairleigh-Dickinson University.

In Morris County, health planners, hospital officials and public health officers devised a response to a widespread outbreak of a communicable disease.

State and county corrections officials also stepped up efforts to monitor any outbreaks and educate jail officers and others about the disease.

The health partnership held a session in September to outline the program to more than 100 educators and health professionals.

Professionals and volunteers who work with children and suspect an occurrence of MRSA are urged to immediately contact their local health department or the Morris County Office of Health Management, Van Orden said.
