

## **Skin Care**

Preventing skin infections can have a huge impact on a fighter's, wrestler's or a team's success. Many skin problems can be prevented or kept in check by good hygiene and proper medical care. Protecting skin from breaks, scrapes and cuts where infections may enter is an important step. (Commercial skin protectants designed to prevent skin infections are available, but have not yet been proven to work.) This handout describes how to prevent infections through proper skin care.

Once infections like ringworm, impetigo, bacterial folliculitis and herpes show up, a team can pay the price for the entire season. Most of these infections are spread by skin-to-skin-contact, but some like impetigo and folliculitis can also spread via surfaces like pads and handles on weight machines and other wrestler's gear. Because these infections are contagious, they must be recognized and treated right away, and require completely avoiding skin-to-skin contact with other people until complete healing. Any wrestler with open, weeping, pustular or vesicular lesions on the skin must be kept from practice and competition until an accurate diagnosis has been made, proper treatment has been done for sufficient time, and all the lesions have healed. For the coaches and parents infections mean getting wrestlers to doctor appointments, changing lineups, and making sure any skin clearance paperwork is done properly and stays up-to-date. For wrestlers, infections are a serious interruption of their season and development in the sport, in addition to the impact on their health. Most sports' rules do not allow competition with active, contagious skin problems, bandaged or not. Bandaging will not prevent spread to other wrestlers or teammates because bandages become wet, shift and peel off.

Athletes with a skin condition must see a physician for diagnosis, treatment and written medical clearance. A referee may request a doctor's written medical clearance before allowing a wrestler to compete, and some states require that specific skin clearance forms be filled out. Keep in mind that some states require that the original form signed by a medical doctor be presented at the time of weigh-in, and a fax or copy is not acceptable. Your doctor may prescribe medicine to control the infection and speed healing. Tell your coach or parents about skin problems right away – ignoring or hiding it will not make it go away.

## **Finger and Toenails**

A fighter or wrestler can be disqualified by the referee for having long nails. This rule is in place to help prevent scratches, eye injuries and infections. So fingernails (and toenails) should be kept clean and trimmed at all times. Each wrestler should have his or her own personal pair of nail clippers. Keep a few sets of fingernail clippers (attached to long strings or other objects to keep them from "walking") in the locker room or wrestling office. Replace the clippers when dull. Have a set of clippers in the training bag at meets to catch the one wrestler who forgets. Do not use fingernail clippers on toenails and do not use toenail clippers on fingernails. Using the wrong clippers will result in rougher cuts and more scratches, possible skin damage and infections, and dull or damage the clippers for the next wrestler. Clean clippers with alcohol once a week or more. Don't chew your nails – it may result in torn skin and infection, and it certainly doesn't add any class to the sport.

## **Hair**

Bangs should never decrease vision. If you have dry skin or dandruff use a quality moisturizing or dandruff shampoo. Use a more expensive brand name as the cheaper brands of shampoo can be drying and irritating to the skin. If you have a skin infection, be sure to inspect the scalp and hair also.

**DO:**

- If you show any signs of infection or have any question about something on your skin tell your coach, parents, team doctor, or family doctor right away.
- Shower with your own soap and shampoo after every practice and meet. Showers should be frequently cleaned. Wear shower clogs or similar footwear.
- Keep your skin dry, nails trimmed, hair cut and face clean-shaven.
- Keep skin scrapes and cuts properly bandaged. Clean minor scrapes with soap and water. Use topical antibacterial ointment like Neosporin® or Bacitracin®.
- If athlete's foot or blisters are a problem do the following: Wear properly fitting shoes and gradually break them in. Air out your shoes between uses. As moisture increases friction between skin and fabric, wear a thin pair of socks under thicker, more absorbent socks. Use an antifungal foot powder.
- Do not share personal items like clothing, shoes, razors or towels.
- Wash your clothes and towel after every practice and meet.
- Use a skin moisturizer or lotion like Vaseline Intensive Care® daily if you have dry skin.
- Take medicines as directed and only if given to you by your parents or doctor.
- Clean headgear with a sanitizer like alcohol.
- Keep the wrestling room clean.
- Have a coach, trainer or team doctor do weekly skin, hair and nail checks for the entire team at a weigh out after practice.

**DON'T:**

- Don't take any pills, creams, or over-the-counter or prescription medicines without your parents' permission and knowledge if you are under 18 years of age.
- Do not cut or trim nails or hair in the wrestling room.
- Don't use peroxide, iodine or bleach. These are "chemical" antiseptics and may do more harm than good. Some of these may scar, irritate your skin and make things look worse to the referee or doctor and delay your return to competition or practice.

This handout should not be considered complete nor a substitute for evaluation and treatment by a physician. Always consult your doctor first.