

## Mat Herpes (Herpes Gladiatorum)

Herpes gladiatorum, also known as “mat herpes”, is a skin infection caused by herpes simplex virus, type 1 (HSV-1), the same virus that causes cold sores. It causes a rash usually on the head, face, neck, shoulders, arms, or trunk. If this infection gets in the eye, it can be serious and requires immediate medical attention.

### Transmission

**Anyone can get mat herpes, but the infection occurs more frequently in wrestlers and other athletes who have close physical contact with others.** The virus can be spread via:

- **Person to Person** through direct skin-to-skin contact.
  - A person can spread this virus until lesions are no longer present or a doctor determines the athlete is no longer infectious.

A past infection does not make a person immune. The virus can “hide out” in the nerves and reactivate later, causing another infection. Generally, recurrent infections are less severe and do not last as long. However, a recurring infection is as contagious as the original infection, therefore the same steps need to be taken to prevent it from infecting others.

### Symptoms

Symptoms typically appear three to eight days after and can include the following:

- **Rash** generally lasts 10 to 14 days. There may be a later reoccurrence of the rash.
- **Cluster of small blisters** that may be painful or painless.
- **Fever.**
- **Swollen lymph glands.**
- **Sore throat.**
- **Tingling on the skin.**

### Diagnosis

Consult your health care provider for a diagnosis. This will be done via a visual skin examination or through a viral culture for the herpes virus.

### Treatment

There is no cure for mat herpes. A health care provider may prescribe an antiviral medication to reduce symptoms and may also reduce the number of times a person has mat herpes.

### Prevention

- **Examine athletes for lesions** on exposed skin and around their mouths or eyes before practice or competition. This should be done by a person familiar with this infection.
- **Wash hands.** Scrub with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. You can use an alcohol-based hand rub if your hands are not visibly soiled.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth** with your hands.
- **Shower using soap after each practice;** use clean towels to dry yourself and do not share towels.

- **Do not pick or squeeze skin sores;** drainage is very infectious.
- **Report** any skin lesions or sores to your coaching staff immediately.
- **Cleaning and disinfecting the environment and equipment daily**
  - Always use an EPA-approved cleaner according to the manufacturer's directions.
    - Ensure supplies for cleaning, and disinfection, are compatible with the surface or material you are cleaning.
  - Wash mats and headgear after every practice or competition.
  - Clean and disinfect locker rooms and shower areas daily.

If you have further questions about the treatment of your mat herpes, contact your health care provider.

## Exclusion Guidance

**Individuals with mat herpes should not be excluded from work, school, or child care** unless the [general exclusions apply](#).

- Athletes participating in close-contact sports, such as wrestling, **should be excluded from competition or practice until healing occurs or until a health care provider determines their condition is non-infectious.**

For additional information about mat herpes, contact the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services', Division of Public Health, at 800.472.2180.

### Resources:

1. Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, December 29). *CDC- Ring Worm*. Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved April 21, 2023, from <https://www.cdc.gov/fungal/diseases/ringworm/index.html>.
2. Kimberlin, D. W., Barnett, E. D., Lynfield, R., Sawyer, M. H. (2021) Red Book: 2021- Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases. 31st ed. American Academy of Pediatrics. [Management and Prevention of Infectious Diseases; Herpes Simplex] [pages 122-133; 407-417].
3. Minnesota Department of Health. (2022, October 25). *Herpes gladiatorum Infection*. Minnesota Department of Health. Retrieved April 27, 2023, from <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/herpes/glad.html>.
4. New York State Department of Health. (2011, February) *Viral Skin Infection: Herpes gladiatorum ("Mat Herpes")*. New York State Department of Health. Retrieved April 27, 2023, from [https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/athletic\\_skin\\_infections/herpes.htm](https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/athletic_skin_infections/herpes.htm)
5. Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, December 29). *CDC- Ring Worm*. Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved April 21, 2023, from <https://cdc.gov/fungal/diseases/ringworm/index.html>.
6. Wisconsin Department of Health Services. (2022, June 15). *Herpes Gladiatorum*. Wisconsin Department of Health Services. Retrieved April 27, 2023, from <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/disease/herpes-gladiatorum.htm>

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