

### What is herpes gladiatorum?

Herpes gladiatorum is a skin infection caused by herpes simplex virus, HSV-1, the same virus that causes cold sores. It causes a rash usually on the head, face, neck, shoulders, arms or trunk. Sometimes eyes can become infected.

### Who is at risk for herpes gladiatorum?

Anyone can get herpes gladiatorum, but the infection occurs more frequently in wrestlers and other athletes who have close physical contact with others.

### What are the symptoms?

Usually a rash or cluster of small blisters develops that can be painful or painless. A fever and swollen lymph glands may be present. The rash generally lasts 10 to 14 days. There may be a later reoccurrence of the rash.

### How soon do symptoms appear?

Usually three to eight days after contact.

### How is herpes gladiatorum spread?

An infected person can pass the virus to an uninfected person by skin-to-skin contact.

### When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?

Until lesions are no longer present or a doctor determines the athlete is no longer infectious.

### How is herpes gladiatorum diagnosed?

See a doctor. After examining the skin the doctor may do a viral culture for herpes virus. Other skin infections may also cause rashes, blisters or lesions.

### What is the treatment?

A doctor may prescribe antiviral medication to speed recovery.

### Does past infection make a person immune?

No.

## **Should children or others be excluded from child care, work or other activities if they have herpes gladiatorum?**

Herpes gladiatorum is most common among wrestlers and other athletes who have close physical contact with others. All athletes with these conditions should be excluded from competition or practice until healing occurs or until a doctor determines their condition is non-infectious.

## **What can be done to prevent the spread of herpes gladiatorum?**

1. 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.
2. Athletes should be excluded from competition or practice until healing occurs.
3. Wrestling mats and headgear should be cleaned and disinfected daily.

### General hygiene

1. Wash your hands often. 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.
2. Shower using soap after each practice; use clean towels to dry yourself and don't share towels.
3. Do not pick or squeeze skin sores; drainage is very infectious.
4. Report any skin lesions or sores to your coaching staff immediately.

### Cleaning and disinfecting the environment

Always use an EPA-approved cleaner, according to manufacturer's directions. If you do not have an EPA-approved cleaner, bleach solution (¼ c bleach: 1 gallon water) may be used. Mix daily to maintain effectiveness.

1. Wash mats after every practice or competition.
2. Clean and disinfect locker rooms and shower areas daily.

## **Additional Information**

Additional information is available by calling the North Dakota Department of Health at 800-472-2180.

### **Resources:**

American Academy of Pediatrics. [Children in Out-Of-Home Child Care]. In: Kimberlin DW, Brady MT, Jackson MA, Long SS, eds. *Red Book: 2018 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 31<sup>st</sup> ed. Itasca, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2018:[122-136].

New York State Department of Health. (2011). Viral skin infection: Herpes gladiatorum ('Mat Herpes'). [www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/athletic\\_skin\\_infections/herpes.htm](http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/athletic_skin_infections/herpes.htm)

Heymann, D. L. (2015). *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual, 20<sup>th</sup> Edition*. Herpesvirus Disease. American Public Health Association. 2015: [275-284].