

Stopping the Spread of MRSA

Stopping the Spread of Misinformation

Issue

Wildfire isn't the only thing that spreads fast in Klickitat County, Washington—fear does too. That's what Klickitat County Public Health learned when a young child was diagnosed with MRSA and neighbors declared an outbreak. Soon a popular local radio talk show was adding fuel to the fire and community members were left scared and misinformed.

MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*) is a type of bacteria that is not killed by commonly used antibiotics. It can cause potentially dangerous infections and can be passed through skin-to-skin contact. Although MRSA is cause for concern, it is also treatable and preventable.

Intervention

A few months earlier, Klickitat County Public Health began developing partnerships with nearby agencies and organizations to help inform and educate the public on communicable diseases. Partners included hospitals, local medical providers, schools, and Head Start programs. The misinformation spreading about MRSA gave everyone their first opportunity to exercise these new relationships. Using 2007 Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant dollars, Klickitat County Public Health led the communication efforts including:

- **Sending E-alerts on communicable disease** with updates and messages to hospitals, nearby health departments, and schools
- **Conducting an interview with correct messaging** on the same popular radio talk show that started the panic
- **Working closely with schools** to provide education to school staff and parents on MRSA
- **Providing workshops** at senior living facilities and adult foster homes
- **Creating educational materials** for distribution by all partners

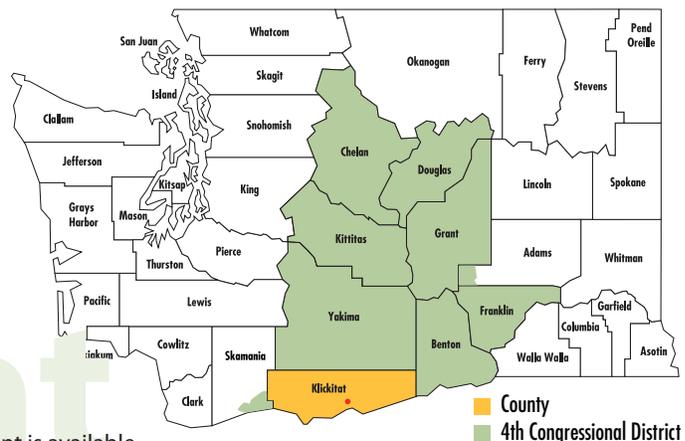
Impact

In a matter of four days, Klickitat County Public Health succeeded in stopping the spread of inaccurate messages about MRSA. By using multiple communication channels and arming partners with accurate information, the public got the information it needed. These efforts also opened the doors for better communication with partners. For example, Klickitat County Public Health now meets with school officials prior to the start of the school year to discuss communicable disease prevention efforts for the coming year.

The new talk of the town is not MRSA but how public health and other organizations work together to keep the people healthy and informed, thanks to Klickitat County Public Health and block grant funds.

County population*: 19,900

Klickitat County Public Health
Goldendale or White Salmon, Washington
<http://www.klickitatcounty.org/health/>



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* 2007, Office of Financial Management