

Skin Conditions and Sports Participation

Most skin conditions do not affect sports participation. As a general rule, young people with skin conditions should be allowed to participate in sports as long as there is no risk of blood or body fluid coming into contact with other athletes. Skin conditions that may affect participation can be divided into temporary and long-term conditions.

Temporary skin conditions

Temporary skin conditions that may affect sports activities include

- **Skin injuries.** Injuries like cuts and scrapes must be covered to prevent blood or body fluid from coming into contact with another player.
- **Friction blisters.** These can be prevented by drying the feet, lubricating with petrolatum, and ensuring proper shoe fit. Blisters already formed can be left alone and covered with a bandage or carefully drained. The top of the blister generally should not be removed.
- **Jogger's nipple.** Friction of fabric against the nipples can cause chafing and bleeding. It can be prevented in women by the use of sports bras, and in men by applying petrolatum or tape, or wearing synthetic or silk shirts.
- **Poison ivy/oak.** This rash is due to allergy to the plants. It is not contagious. However, open sores or blisters must be covered so that no fluid can come in contact with another player.

Skin infections

Athletes with visible signs of skin infection should not be allowed to participate in contact, collision, or limited-contact sports. This can help prevent the spread of infection to other athletes. These include

- **Fever blisters and cold sores.** These are caused by the herpesvirus. They look like clusters of small blisters that soon dry out and form scabs.
- **Herpes gladiatorum.** A type of herpes infection in wrestlers causing lesions on the skin. This infection is very contagious and can spread quickly among teammates or opponents. These look similar to fever blisters at other places on the head.



Herpes infection.



Boil.

- **Boils and impetigo.** Boils are tender red knots with small white or yellow pus heads on top. Impetigo has large blisters filled with pus or shallow raw areas covered with yellow scabs. These infections are usually caused by *Staphylococcus* bacteria. Sometimes the *Staphylococcus* can be treated easily with antibiotics. At other times, however, it may be an antibiotic-resistant strain (also called *MRSA*). This resistant germ can cause serious illness if not recognized and treated early.
- **Ringworm.** This infection is caused by a fungus, similar to the fungus that causes athlete's foot. It may look like a round or oval patch with pink or red raised edges covered by fine flakes of skin. The center may look normal. Ringworm fungal infection in wrestlers is commonly called *tinea gladiatorum*.
- **Scabies.** A very itchy rash that is highly contagious. It looks like small pink or red bumps and is often found on the hands between fingers and on the wrist.

Long-term skin conditions

Athletes with long-term skin problems are not usually limited in their sports participation. Some conditions require special care to prevent making the skin problem worse. This includes

- **Psoriasis and vitiligo.** Athletes need to protect their skin from scrapes to avoid making the skin problem flare.
- **Sun sensitivity problems.** Athletes should use sunblock and wear hats and sun-protective clothing.
- **Inherited blistering disorders.** Athletes must use protective padding and avoid friction injuries as much as possible.
- **Hives.** Athletes may have flares during sports activities and should have medicine available.

**CARE OF THE YOUNG ATHLETE PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUTS—
SKIN CONDITIONS AND SPORTS PARTICIPATION**

Skin conditions and how they affect sports participation

Condition	What Must the Athlete Do?	Is It OK to Participate?
Minor cuts, scrapes	Must be covered to prevent blood transfer to other players. Bandage should be waterproof.	Yes if special care is taken
Friction blisters	If new, leave intact. If open, cover with bandage.	Yes
Jogger's nipple	Sports bras for women; petrolatum or tape for men.	Yes
Poison ivy/oak	Must cover open sores or blisters.	Yes
Psoriasis	Try to prevent scrapes.	Yes
Vitiligo	Try to prevent scrapes.	Yes
Impetigo, boils	Potentially contagious.	No
Acne	No limitations as long as no open wounds.	Yes
Herpes, fever blisters	Potentially contagious.	No
Warts	Potentially contagious.	Yes, if solitary or localized warts can be securely covered
Ringworm fungus	Potentially contagious.	No
Sun sensitivity problems	Must use sunblock and wear hat and sun-protective clothing.	Yes if special care is taken
Inherited blistering disorders	Must use protective padding and avoid friction injury.	Yes if special care is taken
Hives	May experience flares from heat or exertion.	Yes if special care is taken
Other long-term skin problems	In general, no limitations.	Yes

NOTES

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