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opportunity

Maureen Spencer, MEd, RN, Infection Control Manager at NEBH, helped the Celtics organization evaluate the team's practice facility in Waltham and address long-standing habits that could lead to infection transmission.



## Celtics Turn to the Baptist for Help with MRSA

When the Celtics arrived for the 2007-08 season, all players were checked for staph infections.

Melissa Driscoll, Medical Technician, Department of Medicine, took cultures from Celtics guard Ray Allen.

MRSA isn't just challenging hospitals; it is a familiar problem among amateur and professional athletes, especially those who play contact sports such as football, basketball and wrestling. All it takes is a minor cut or abrasion for an infection to occur and then be transmitted to others.

"I knew about the first infection, but when the second one occurred, I realized it wasn't likely a coincidence," says Brian McKeon, MD, NEBH sports medicine specialist and Chief Medical Officer for the Boston Celtics, about the MRSA infections that were diagnosed in two Celtics players in late 2006. "Once we knew it was MRSA, within a few hours we had cultured every player on the team."

McKeon contacted Susan Davidson, MD, Chief of Infectious Disease at NEBH, who oversaw antibiotic treatment for the players. Maureen Spencer, MEd, RN, Infection Control Manager, followed up at the Celtics' practice facility in Waltham with Carol Kale, RN, Susan Cohen, MT, and Jan Sliby, RN, Medical Coordinator for the Boston Celtics, to investigate further. "We cultured everyone there—about 80 people—along with the environment, including bathrooms, whirlpools, massage tables and exercise mats," says Spencer, adding that they detected a degree of regular staph germs, which is common in environments such as gyms.

The Celtics organization wasted no time in ensuring that the team's practice environment

remained germ-free by having the Waltham facility and the locker rooms at the TD Banknorth Garden professionally sanitized. A crew of more than 40 people was hired to get the work done.

"This was a situation that required our immediate attention," says Danny Ainge, Executive Director of Basketball Operations. "We are thankful to Brian McKeon and the Baptist staff for quickly containing the problem. We're following the comprehensive infection control plan they developed for us. I feel confident we'll avoid future outbreaks."

The plan included changing long-standing habits, notes McKeon. "With Maureen's help, we evaluated how we do everything," he says. "For example, the players no longer share soap, toothpaste or clothing, and Ed Lacerte, the team's athletic trainer, now wears disposable gloves a lot more often."

The goal is to remain vigilant. When the team arrived for the 2007 season, all players were re-cultured. "There presently are no defined guidelines on how to best prevent these infections among teams," says McKeon, who was asked to speak before the National Basketball Association Team Physicians Society. "But we are collaborating in order to establish guidelines that all NBA medical staff will follow. By working with the Baptist, the Celtics avoided a potential disaster. That's what we're here for."