

Health & Safety Update – March 2018

Verrucas

A regular query for the health and safety team is the management of verrucas in physical education. A verruca (also known as a plantar wart) is a wart on the sole of the foot.

How is a verruca transmitted?

- They are usually spread by direct skin-to-skin contact, or indirectly via contact with contaminated floors or surfaces (for example in swimming pools or communal washing areas).
 - Infection is more likely to occur if the skin is damaged or wet.
 - If a wart is scratched or knocked, it can bleed, making it easier for the virus to spread to other parts of the body.
- The incubation period for verrucas is thought to range from a few weeks to more than a year. It can therefore take months for a verruca to appear following contact with the virus. This may dispel many of the myths of the student who now has a result of attending school swimming the previous week.

NHS Guidance:

How to stop warts and verrucas spreading:

Do

- Wash your hands after touching a wart or verruca
- Change your socks daily if you have a verruca
- Cover warts and verrucas with a plaster when swimming

Don't

- Share towels, flannels, socks or shoes if you have a wart or verruca
- Walk barefoot in public places if you have a verruca
- Scratch or pick a wart or verruca

Swim England Advice

The use of devices, such as plastic socks, to protect the feet should be discouraged. As with elasticated knee bandages, the socks have limited value other than of attracting attention. The use of a waterproof plaster is sufficient.

The Association for Physical Education (afPE) Advice:

- afPE strongly supports school swimming and the need for young people to maximise their learning time in the water. There is no justification for excluding verruca sufferers from swimming. If a verruca is painful treatment is available in the form of creams, sprays and plasters from a pharmacist or a podiatrist.
- afPE adheres to the Swim England recommendation of a waterproof plaster covering a verruca. The aim is to provide an effective barrier between the sole of the foot and the poolside.
- It is important to remember warts and veruccas are small lumps on the skin that most people have at some point in their life. They usually go away on their own and not associated with death or serious injury.
- The importance of all children and young people learning to swim and developing their stroke technique whilst at school can never be under estimated. With a high quality swimming curriculum pupils will learn about safe-self rescue in different water-based situations which could save their and other people's life one day.
- The key message here is to cover the verucca and make the most of every precious swimming lesson.