

Herpes Zoster (Shingles)

Definition:

Herpes zoster (shingles) is a disease caused by the varicella zoster virus, the same virus that causes chickenpox. Shingles occurs when the virus is reactivated after being dormant in the body for several years. Although rare, shingles can occur in someone who received varicella vaccine in the past.

Signs and Symptoms:

Symptoms include a painful, itchy rash on one side of the face or body. The rash is often preceded by pain, burning, or tingling in the area where the rash appears. In immunocompromised persons, the rash may appear more generalized and look similar to chickenpox. Fever, chills, headache, and upset stomach can also occur.

Transmission:

Shingles is not spread from person to person. Only people who have had chickenpox can get shingles. However, someone with shingles can spread chickenpox to someone who has never had chickenpox before. The virus is spread through direct contact with draining lesions only when the rash is in the blister phase. Transmission cannot occur before the blisters appear. Unlike chickenpox, transmission does not occur through coughing, sneezing, or casual contact. Once the rash has developed crusts, the person is no longer contagious. The risk of a person with shingles spreading the virus is low if the rash is covered.

Diagnosis:

Shingles is diagnosed by clinical symptoms, and laboratory confirmation in certain cases.

Role of the School Nurse:

Prevention

- Update and maintain vaccine records.
 - All school-aged children in schools are required to have one documented dose of the varicella vaccine by state statute; but two doses are required to be considered fully immunized.
- Encourage shingles vaccination of staff 60 years of age and older
- Teach students and staff to cover their noses and mouths when sneezing or coughing.
- Promote proper hand washing particularly after contact with the rash or after changing bandages to prevent the spread of disease.
- **Ensure rash is covered during the blister phase**

Treatment Recommendations:

- Several antiviral medicines are available to treat shingles, but must be started as soon as possible after the rash appears

Exclusions:

- There are no exclusions for shingles unless the rash cannot be covered during the blister phase
- There are no exclusions for unvaccinated students or students with incomplete varicella immunization records

Reporting Requirements:

Shingles is not a reportable condition, but nurses may consult with Maine CDC, if needed, at 1-800-821-5821.

Resources:

- Maine DOE website <http://www.maine.gov/education/sh/>
- Maine CDC varicella website (including fact sheet) <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/vaccine/varicella.shtml>
- Maine immunization laws <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/immunization/family/rules.html>
- Varicella poster for ordering <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/order-form-wn.shtml>
- Federal CDC shingles website www.cdc.gov/shingles