**Varicella (Chickenpox) Disease**

**Definition:**

Varicella (Chickenpox) is a disease caused by the varicella zoster virus.

**Signs and Symptoms:**

Symptoms include a skin rash of blister-like lesions that cover the body but are concentrated on the face, scalp, and trunk. Most infected individuals experience fever which develops just before or when the rash appears. If a vaccinated individual is exposed they may experience a milder illness.

**Transmission:**

Varicella is highly contagious and is spread by direct contact, coughing, sneezing, and aerosolization of the virus from skin lesions.

**Diagnosis:**

Varicella is diagnosed by clinical symptoms (i.e. maculo-papulovesicular rash) and/or laboratory tests.

**Role of the School Nurse:**

**Prevention:**

* Update and maintain vaccine records. Children in school are required by state statute to have two documented doses of varicella vaccine for entry into kindergarten; two doses are needed to be fully immunized.
* Teach students and staff to cover their noses and mouths when sneezing or coughing.
* Promote proper hand washing particularly after using facial tissues or having contact with respiratory secretions to prevent the spread of disease.

**Treatment Recommendations:**

* Calamine lotion may help relieve itching.
* Do not use aspirin or aspirin-containing products to relieve fever from varicella. The use of aspirin in children with varicella has been associated with Reye’s syndrome, a severe disease that affects the liver and brain and can cause death.
* Antivirals are recommended for people who are more likely to develop serious disease.
* Refer individuals to their health care providers as needed.

**Exclusions:**

* Exclusions should only be made after obtaining a provider diagnosis of varicella. Parents and staff should be notified of exposure. Contact Maine CDC for a notification template.
* People with varicella should be excluded from social, academic, and employment activities until rash has crusted (~5 days) or, in immunized people without crusts, until no new lesions appear for 24 hours.
* There are no exclusions for asymptomatic vaccinated individuals.
* If the school has reached outbreak status, 3 or more cases, unvaccinated students, or students with incomplete varicella immunization records must be excluded for 21 days from the onset of symptoms of the last identified case.

**Reporting Requirements:**

Varicella is a reportable and should be reported immediately to Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821.

**Resources:**

* Maine DOE website <http://www.maine.gov/education/sh/>
* Maine CDC varicella website (including fact sheet) [www.maine.gov/dhhs/varicella](http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/varicella)
* Maine School Immunization Requirements <https://www.maine.gov/doe/sites/maine.gov.doe/files/inline-files/ME%20Immunization%20Requirements%20for%20Schools%209-25-2021.pdf>
* Federal CDC varicella website [www.cdc.gov/varicella](http://www.cdc.gov/varicella)