

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, covering the body but mostly concentrated in the face, scalp, and trunk. Most infected individuals experience fever, which develops either just before or when the rash appears. If a vaccinated individual is exposed they may experience a milder illness with less severe rash and mild or no fever.

Transmission:

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

Diagnosis:

Varicella is diagnosed by clinical symptoms such as maculo-papulovesicular rash, 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.
- 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 and colloidal oatmeal baths may help relieve itching
- Do not use aspirin or aspirin-containing products to relieve fever from chickenpox. The use of aspirin in children with chickenpox has been associated with Reye's syndrome, a severe disease that affects the liver and brain and can cause death
- Antiviral medications are recommended for people with varicella who are more likely to develop serious disease.

Exclusions:

- Persons with the disease should be excluded from social, academic, and employment activities until rash has crusted (usually in 5 days), or in immunized people without crusts, until no new lesions appear for 24 hours.
- There are no exclusions for varicella vaccinated individuals.
- Unvaccinated students, or students with incomplete varicella immunization records must be excluded for 16 days from the onset of symptoms of the last identified case.

Reporting Requirements:

Varicella is a reportable condition and every case 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) <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 varicella website www.cdc.gov/varicella