Poliomyelitis (Polio)

Definition:
Polio is caused by an enterovirus that lives in the throat and gastrointestinal tract.

Signs and symptoms:
Most people with polio infection will not experience any symptoms. Some will experience minor symptoms such as fever, fatigue, nausea, headache, flu-like symptoms, stiffness in the back and neck, and pain in the limbs which may resolve. A very small percentage will suffer permanent paralysis of the limbs (usually the legs).

Transmission:
Polio is spread person-to-person through contact with either the throat secretions or the stool of an infected person.

Diagnosis:
Poliovirus is diagnosed through laboratory testing of stool, blood, cerebrospinal fluid (CSF), or a pharyngeal sample.

Role of the School Nurse:

Prevention

- Most children should be vaccinated for poliovirus prior to attending school
- The importance of polio vaccination should be communicated to children and their parents
- Good hand hygiene and thorough hand washing should be emphasized, particularly after using the toilet
- Disinfectants or bleach along with proper masking and usage of gloves should be used by staff to clean up diarrhea or vomit from a potentially sick child
- Toys and commonly used surfaces or items should be routinely disinfected
- Students or staff planning to travel to certain areas where polio is still circulating should be made aware of the danger of polio infection and be vaccinated prior to travel

Treatment Recommendations

- If symptoms are noted, the child should be referred to their provider for evaluation
- There is no specific pharmaceutical treatment, only respiratory support and anti-inflammatory treatment for brain swelling

Exclusions

- Exclusion is generally not recommended for ill students as transmission most likely will occur before the illness is confirmed.
- Susceptible contacts may be immunized but quarantine is generally not recommended.

Reporting Requirements

- Polio is a reportable disease – immediately report suspected polio-like symptoms to Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821

Resources:

- Maine CDC Infectious Disease Epidemiology website: https://maine.gov/idepi
- Federal CDC polio website http://www.cdc.gov/polio/

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