Shellfish Poisoning

Definition: Shellfish poisoning is caused by marine biotoxins produced by Harmful Algal Blooms (HAB) which can contaminate certain seafood. The seafood contaminated with these toxins frequently looks, smells, and tastes normal.

Signs and Symptoms: Symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, numbness and tingling in the face, mouth and hands, and loss of muscle coordination. In extreme cases, severe neurological signs such as seizures, memory loss, respiratory failure, or paralysis can occur. Symptom onset can occur within minutes to 24 hours after ingestion of contaminated shellfish.

Transmission: Illness occurs when an individual eats contaminated shellfish.

Diagnosis: Diagnosis is made by clinical symptoms and can be confirmed with positive testing of the shellfish. There is no commercial test available for humans.

Role of the School Nurse:

- **Prevention:**
  - Consult Department of Marine Resources on current closures for shellfish harvesting due to algal blooms and red tide notices: https://www.maine.gov/dmr/fisheries/shellfish/closures
  - Do not eat finfish or shellfish sold as bait. Bait products do not need to meet the same food safety regulations as seafood for human consumption.
  - Do not harvest shellfish from floating containers or harvested from open ocean.
  - Consume shellfish from certified dealers only.
  - **Cooking or freezing contaminated shellfish does not kill the toxin.**
  - Avoid consuming lobster or crab tomalley (guts).
- **Treatment:** There is no specific treatment. Supportive care should be given as needed. Symptoms usually resolve within hours to 3 days without treatment. If someone becomes very ill, they should seek medical attention.
- **Exclusions:** Students or staff with vomiting/diarrhea should be excluded until asymptomatic.
- **Referral**: Student with clinically compatible illness should be referred to primary care provider.

Reporting Requirements: Shellfish poisoning must be reported immediately at first suspicion of the disease. Report cases to Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821.

Resources:

- US CDC link: https://www.cdc.gov/harmful-algal-blooms/signs-symptoms/symptoms-saltwater-harmful-algal-blooms.html
- Maine Department of Marine Resources link: https://www.maine.gov/dmr/fisheries/shellfish

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