



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 condition and should be reported immediately to Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821.

Resources:

- Maine DOE website, nurse resources
<https://www.maine.gov/doe/schools/safeschools/healthed/nurseresources/guidelines>
- Maine CDC varicella website (including fact sheet) www.maine.gov/dhhs/varicella
- Maine School Immunization
<https://www.maine.gov/doe/schools/safeschools/healthed/nurseresources/manual/immunization>
- Federal CDC varicella website www.cdc.gov/varicella