



Herpes Zoster (Shingles)

Definition:

Herpes zoster (shingles) is a disease caused by the varicella zoster virus; the same virus that causes varicella (chickenpox). Shingles occurs when the virus is reactivated after being dormant in the body.

Signs and Symptoms:

Symptoms include a painful, itchy rash on one side of the body. The rash is often preceded by pain, burning, or tingling in the area where the rash appears. In immunocompromised persons, the rash may be more generalized and look like varicella. Fever, chills, headache, and upset stomach can also occur.

Transmission:

Shingles is not spread from person-to-person. Only people who have had varicella or varicella vaccination can get shingles. However, someone with shingles can spread varicella to someone who has never had varicella before. The virus is spread only in the blister phase through direct contact with draining lesions. Transmission cannot occur before the blisters appear. Once the rash has developed crusts, the person is no longer contagious. The risk of a person with shingles spreading the virus is low if the blistering rash is covered.

Diagnosis:

Shingles is diagnosed by clinical symptoms, and laboratory confirmation in certain cases.

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.
- Encourage shingles vaccination of staff 50 years of age and older.
- Promote proper hand washing particularly after contact with the rash or after changing bandages to prevent the spread of disease.
- **Ensure rash is covered during the blister phase.**

Treatment Recommendations:

- Several antiviral medicines are available to treat shingles but must be started as soon as possible after the rash appears. Refer people with shingles to their health care provider.

Exclusions:

- There are no exclusions for people with shingles unless the rash is generalized or cannot be covered during the blister phase.
- There are no exclusions for students.

Reporting Requirements:

Shingles is not reportable, but nurses may consult with Maine CDC, if needed, 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
- 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 shingles website www.cdc.gov/shingles