

Hepatitis B

Definition:

Hepatitis B is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis B virus.

- Acute Hepatitis B is a short-term illness that occurs within the first 6 months after someone is exposed to the Hepatitis B virus (HBV). Acute infection can — but does not always — lead to chronic infection.
- Chronic Hepatitis B is a lifelong illness that occurs when HBV remains in a person's body for longer than 6 months and causes inflammation of the liver. Over time, this can cause cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver, liver cancer, liver failure, and death.

Signs and symptoms:

Signs and symptoms of Hepatitis B include fatigue, lack of appetite, dark urine, fever and vomiting. Jaundice (a yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes) may appear. Sometimes a person with Hepatitis B has no symptoms at all.

Transmission:

Hepatitis B is spread by contact with infectious blood, semen, and other body fluids primarily through:

- Birth to an infected mother
- Sexual contact with an infected person
- Sharing of contaminated needles, syringes, or other injection drug equipment
- Needlesticks or other sharp instrument injuries

Diagnosis:

Hepatitis B is diagnosed by a series of blood tests that can identify acute or chronic forms of the disease.

Role of the School Nurse:

Prevention

- Hepatitis B vaccine is recommended for all children starting at birth for a series of 3 shots
- Standard precautions should be used for all children and staff in the school setting

Treatment Recommendations

- If acute infection is suspected, the student should be referred immediately to his or her primary care provider or local emergency department for further evaluation.

Exclusions:

No exclusions are indicated for students or staff with Hepatitis B. Standard precautions should be used for all students and staff.

Reporting Requirements:

Hepatitis B is a reportable condition and should be reported to Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821.

Resources:

- Maine CDC Hepatitis website (including fact sheet)
<http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/hepatitis/index.shtml>
- Federal CDC Hepatitis B website
<http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hbv/index.htm>
- Immunization Action Coalition Hepatitis B website (including vaccine information)
<http://www.immunize.org/hepatitis-b/>