**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:**  
Less than half of people with hepatitis B have symptoms. For those that do have symptoms, they include fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, clay-colored stool, and joint pain. 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:

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

**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 everyone starting at birth. Encourage Hepatitis B vaccination series completion.
* 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)  
  [www.maine.gov/dhhs/hepatitis](http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/hepatitis)
* 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/>