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To: School Nurses and Administrators in Maine
From: Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC) and Maine Immunization Program (MIP)
Subject: Notice of change to Varicella exclusion criteria

What is varicella (chickenpox)?

Varicella is a very contagious virus. It usually begins as a mild illness with fever, headache, tiredness and loss of appetite. One to two days later, an itchy rash that starts as small, red bumps will appear. Those bumps then become blistered, ooze and then crust over. The rash appears about two weeks (14-21 days) after exposure. Most people with varicella recover without any problems, but for some it can be severe or lead to complications. Varicella is spread through exposure to infected fluids from the nose, throat, or skin rash of someone with varicella. It can be spread for 2-5 days before the rash starts until all blisters are crusted over (usually 5-7 days after rash appears).

Maine CDC has recently made a change to the exclusion recommendations for cases of varicella in a school. Going forward, Maine CDC is **no longer recommending exclusion for unvaccinated students when there are only one or two varicella cases within the school**. This guidance is the same as for cases in a daycare facility. Schools may choose to exclude unvaccinated students in the event of one or two positive cases, but this is a school decision. **Students with varicella should still be excluded from any social, academic and employment activities until rash has crusted, or in immunized people without crusts, until no new lesions appear for 24 hours**. This change will go into effect at the start of the 2020-2021 school year.

In the event of 3 or more cases of varicella (i.e. outbreak):

- Exclusion is required for both the cases and unvaccinated children who are in the same facility as the varicella cases.
- The period of exclusion for unvaccinated students is 21 days after the onset of the last known case in the outbreak.
- Unvaccinated students excluded during the outbreak may return to school prior to 21 days if they provide proof of varicella immunity.

Recommendations for children who have been exposed to chickenpox:

1. For children who are immune compromised, it is important to contact the child's healthcare provider immediately to let them know they have been exposed.
2. Make sure children are up-to-date on vaccinations, including the varicella vaccine. Children aged 12 months – 5 years with no vaccine should get one dose as soon as possible. Those with one dose of vaccine should get a second dose as soon as possible (as long as it has been at least 30 days since the first dose).
3. Watch for signs of illness. Children who have been vaccinated can still get varicella.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821.
More information can be found here: www.maine.gov/dhhs/varicella