

Poliomyelitis (Polio)

Definition:

Polio is caused by an enterovirus that lives in the throat and gastrointestinal tract.

Signs and symptoms:

Most people with polio infection will not experience any symptoms. Some will experience minor symptoms such as fever, fatigue, nausea, headache, flu-like symptoms, stiffness in the back and neck, and pain in the limbs which may resolve. A very small percentage will suffer permanent paralysis of the limbs (usually the legs).

Transmission:

Polio is spread person-to-person through contact with either the throat secretions or the stool of an infected person.

Diagnosis:

Poliovirus is diagnosed through laboratory testing of a stool, blood, cerebrospinal fluid (CSF), or pharyngeal sample.

Role of the School Nurse:

Prevention

- Most children should be vaccinated for poliovirus prior to attending school
- The importance of polio vaccination should be communicated to children and their parents
- Good hand hygiene and thorough hand washing should be emphasized, particularly after using the toilet
- Disinfectants or bleach along with proper masking and usage of gloves should be used by staff to clean up diarrhea or vomit from a potentially sick child
- Toys and commonly used surfaces or items should be routinely disinfected
- Students or staff planning to travel to certain areas where polio is still common (West and Central Africa, Eastern Mediterranean, and Middle East-Afghanistan/Pakistan) should be made aware of the danger of polio infection

Treatment Recommendations

- If symptoms are noted, the child should be referred to their provider for evaluation
- There is no specific pharmaceutical treatment, only respiratory support and anti-inflammatory treatment for brain swelling

Exclusions

- School exclusions should be discussed on a case-by-case basis with Maine CDC

Reporting Requirements

- Polio is a reportable disease – report immediately suspected polio-like symptoms to Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821

Resources:

- Maine CDC polio website (including fact sheet) <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/vaccine/polio.shtml>
- Federal CDC polio website <http://www.cdc.gov/polio/>