

**Connecticut State Department of Education  
Connecticut Department of Public Health**

To: School Nurse Supervisors  
School Medical Advisors

From: George Dowaliby  
Acting Associate Commissioner of Education

Dr. James Hadler, MD, MPH, State Epidemiologist  
Department of Public Health

Date: February 28, 2007

Subject: Updated Guidelines for Chickenpox Outbreak Prevention and Control for School  
and Childcare Settings

Dear School Administrators/Nurses:

In June 2006, the national Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) changed the recommendation for routine vaccination against chickenpox (varicella) from a single dose for all children beginning at 12 months of age to two doses, with the second dose given at age 4-6 years, just prior to school entry. The ACIP also recommended that all school-aged children up to 18 years of age who have only had a single dose of varicella vaccine be vaccinated with a second dose. Experience over the past 10 years has shown that, while a single dose of varicella vaccine protects greater than 95% of the children against a severe infection of chickenpox disease, it is only 80-85% effective at protecting against active infection and does not prevent sustained outbreaks of chickenpox from occurring in schools and does not provide a fully adequate buffer for those who cannot be vaccinated. Most importantly, there is now accumulating evidence that vaccine-induced immunity may begin to wane after 10 years. Given the new recommendations to move to a population vaccinated with two doses of varicella vaccine, an updated approach to chickenpox outbreaks in schools is needed.

Between 20-40 chickenpox outbreaks continue to occur in school settings each year among vaccinated children in Connecticut. During these chickenpox outbreaks, up to 17 percent of children vaccinated with a single dose of varicella-containing vaccine may develop chickenpox. Chickenpox in vaccinated children is usually mild, but the children are contagious and can transmit the virus to others including parents and persons who are ineligible for vaccination and who are at higher risk of severe disease. The purpose of this communication is to provide guidance to school medical advisors, school nurses and administrators to help contain chickenpox outbreaks in school settings.

The varicella zoster virus (VZV), which causes both chickenpox and shingles, is very contagious and can spread through an infected person's breath or direct contact with lesions. A fully susceptible (unvaccinated) person will probably get chickenpox if he/she is in contact with someone who has either chickenpox or shingles.

Chickenpox *outbreaks* can last for 3 to 6 months in schools, sometimes even in schools with a high percentage of children vaccinated with a single varicella vaccine dose. The new ACIP recommendations call for attempting to limit the size and duration of outbreaks in school settings by encouraging revaccination of all in the school who have not yet received a second dose of varicella vaccine. The Connecticut Department of Public Health strongly encourages any school with an outbreak of chickenpox to actively advise parents of all children in the school who have had only one or no previous doses of varicella vaccine to contact their regular health care provider for vaccination.

To assist you in controlling the spread of chickenpox at your school, we have updated and enclosed two letters for your use. **1)** An *exposure letter* that notifies parents/guardians of the recent chickenpox exposures and the availability of the vaccine to prevent their child from becoming ill. This letter should be sent to parents of all children and all staff after reporting one case of chickenpox or shingles from your school. **2)** An *outbreak letter* that notifies parents/guardians and staff about a chickenpox outbreak at a school when 3 or more cases of varicella have been reported in students over a three-week period. The italicized areas on the letter should be edited to include your school's contact information. The appropriate letter should then be sent to the parents/guardians of the susceptible (unvaccinated) or once-vaccinated children who attend your school using your institution's letterhead.

We have enclosed several additional documents for your use. They include guidelines for controlling and preventing chickenpox outbreaks in school and childcare settings, evaluating chickenpox-like rash in recipients of varicella vaccine in day care and school settings, chickenpox fact sheet and a varicella case report form.

If you have any questions about the guidance documents for preventing and controlling chickenpox outbreaks in School and Childcare Settings, please contact the state Immunization Program at 860-509-7929.

Sincerely,

Enc: Guidelines for Chickenpox Outbreak Prevention and Control in School or Childcare Settings  
Exposure and Outbreak Letters  
Guidelines for Health Care Personnel in Evaluating Chickenpox-like Rash in Recipients of Varicella Vaccine in Day Care and School Settings  
Varicella Case Report Form  
Chickenpox Fact Sheet  
Cc: Superintendents of Schools