



Public Health
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School district talking points for chickenpox

The following talking points may be useful as the basis for letters to parents, for background in talking to the media, and for other written or verbal communications in the event of a chickenpox outbreak at school:

Overview of chickenpox

- Chickenpox is a highly contagious disease caused by varicella zoster virus (VZV). It spreads from person to person by direct contact or through the air from an infected person's coughing or sneezing. The illness starts 10 to 21 days after contact with an infected person and causes a characteristic itchy rash with pink spots and fluid-filled blisters ("pox") that dry and become scabs in 4 to 5 days. Illness is often relatively mild but can be severe in infants, pregnant women, adults, and people with weakened immune systems. Vaccination is the best way to prevent chickenpox. [See attached fact sheet for more details.]

Control measures for parents (Clark County Public Health recommendations)

- Outbreaks of chickenpox in school settings can often take months to resolve unless initial actions are implemented early.
- Keep all children home from school who have chickenpox. Allow their return when each chickenpox mark has dried to a hard scab.
- Make sure your children have been immunized with at least one dose of vaccine for chickenpox. Two doses are recommended, especially when there is an outbreak of cases at the school.
- Thank you, parents, for your cooperation. Please report any new onsets of chickenpox in students to the Clark County Public Health nursing staff at (360) 397-8182. Nursing staff will be in close contact with the school nurse to provide consultation and support.

Outbreak control measures for school per Clark County Health Officer order

The school(s) will exclude all un-immunized students who do not show evidence of at least one dose of chickenpox vaccine. Students are to be excluded for a period of 21 days. The 21-day count begins at the onset of the last case of disease in the school. For example, if the last onset was on _____, the return date will be _____.

- Readmit excluded students sooner than 21 days if they show evidence of immunity to chickenpox. Immunity can be demonstrated by **either**:
 - A letter from their physician or other licensed health care provider that confirms that a blood test shows immunity, **OR**

- A letter from the physician or other licensed health care provider that documents that the student had a prior illness of chickenpox.
- Excluded students can also be readmitted if they show proof that they were vaccinated within 3 days of exposure to the last case. For example, if their date of last exposure to a case was on _____, the student will need to receive vaccination by _____. If not, they will be excluded for the 21-day period.
- [If appropriate] At this point, the chickenpox cases are limited to [grade, classroom, etc.] However, if the disease spreads to the other grades, these recommendations will be in effect for the whole school facility.
- Refer susceptible (unvaccinated or without documentation of disease) pregnant women and students/staff with weakened immune systems to their health care provider for assessment.

Additional information

- Washington State Department of Health:
<http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/immunize/diseases/varicella/default.htm>
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/varicella/default.htm>