



Prevention and Control of Varicella (Chickenpox) in Schools and Child Care Settings Guidelines for School Nurse Teachers

Infectious Agent: Varicella Zoster Virus

Mode of Transmission: Spread by close contact (sharing breathing space or direct touching) with infected secretions from nose, throat or rash.

Incubation Period: Range of 10 to 21 days from time of exposure (typically 14-16 days)

Infectious Period: 1-2 days before rash appears until all rash vesicles (fluid-filled blisters) have crusted, or if there are no vesicles, until no new lesions appear for 24 hours.

Symptoms: **Wild-type chickenpox in unvaccinated persons:** Generalized rash (typically 200-400 lesions) with many vesicles. Usually mild fever, cold symptoms and rash 1-2 days before rash onset.

Breakthrough chickenpox in vaccinated person: Generalized rash more maculopapular than vesicular (usually less than 50 lesions).

Reporting Varicella:

1. Report any cases of varicella to **RIDOH by phone at 401-222-2577**
2. Please have the following information ready:
 - a. **Clinical information:** Symptoms, rash onset date, parent and pediatrician contact information
 - b. **Exposure information:** Student's grade and/or class, transportation to/from school, participation in after-school activities
 - c. **School information:** How many classes of each grade, which grades interact, whether students change classes, length of lunch, school trips, etc.
 - d. **Vaccination information:** Number of children in the exposed grades who are unvaccinated or who have only received 1 dose of varicella-containing vaccine

Responding to Varicella:

1. RIDOH may recommend the distribution of a letter to parents of exposed students.
2. RIDOH will provide a template for this letter
3. The School Nurse Teacher is responsible for distributing the letter.

Prevention and Control of Varicella:

1. **Exclude any child with varicella** from school/day care until all rash vesicles (blisters) have crusted, or if there are no vesicles (common in vaccinated children), until no new lesions appear for 24 hours.
2. Identify susceptible children or adults who are at high risk for developing severe disease (i.e., pregnant women and immunocompromised individuals) and refer to their health care provider.
3. Ensure that all students are up to date on immunizations. Refer unvaccinated students to their health care providers for vaccination. See the Rhode Island Childhood Immunization Schedule at <http://bit.ly/RIChildhoodImmunization>.
4. Well students (even those who are unvaccinated) **should not be excluded** from school in a non-outbreak situation. An outbreak must be determined in consultation with RIDOH.