

Health Advisory: Varicella (Chickenpox) Outbreak in North Metro

Minnesota Department of Health Tue Apr 4, 2017 09:00 CDT

Action Steps:

Local and tribal health departments: Please forward to hospitals, clinics, urgent care, and convenience clinics in **Anoka, Chisago, Hennepin, Isanti, Ramsey, Sherburne, and Washington** counties.

Hospitals and clinics: Please distribute to health care professionals.

Health care professionals:

- Call MDH to arrange for specimen testing for varicella
- Report all suspected cases of varicella to MDH and include a rash description
- Counsel patients to remain at home until PCR results are back or until rash has resolved

Background

A K-12 school with over 600 students in Anoka County is experiencing an outbreak of varicella. Many of the students are unvaccinated. We are concerned about severe cases of varicella occurring, particularly in those age 12 years and older. We are also seeing a general increase in varicella activity in this area.

Laboratory Testing

Laboratory testing is needed to confirm cases of varicella so timely public health actions can take place. Call MDH at 651-201-5414 to arrange for specimen testing. The MDH Public Health Laboratory (PHL) is able to perform PCR testing at no charge. Specimens from lesions, such as fluid, skin scrapings, or scabs, can be submitted to the MDH-PHL for PCR. PCR is the recommended test for varicella; it is rapid, sensitive, and specific.

The communicable disease reporting rule requires submission of clinical materials for suspected or confirmed varicella cases. A laboratory fact sheet with further guidance is posted on Varicella Information for Health Professionals (www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/varicella/hcp/index.html).

Report Varicella Cases Immediately

Report suspected varicella cases immediately to MDH. Call MDH at 1-877-676-5414 or fill out the Varicella Reporting Form (www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/dtopics/reportable/forms/varicellaform.html).

Exclusion and PEP Recommendations

Children diagnosed with varicella must stay home until the rash has resolved; in some cases a week or more. Non-immune pregnant women and immunocompromised individuals who are exposed to varicella are candidates for varicella immune globulin. Vaccine given within 3 days, and possibly up to 5 days, of exposure can prevent or reduce the severity of infection.

Questions

Please call the Minnesota Department of Health at 1-877-676-5414.

A copy of this HAN is available at www.health.state.mn.us/han/.

The content of this message is intended for public health and health care personnel and response partners who have a need to know the information to perform their duties.