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Varicella (Chickenpox) Notification

Date: May 13, 2021

The Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) wants you to know that a student at Worth Junior High in Worth, Illinois has been recently diagnosed with Chickenpox. Most students attending school are expected to be protected against varicella infections (like chickenpox) by vaccination or previous disease. However, susceptible children exposed to someone with chickenpox could begin to have symptoms within the next two weeks. Because of your child's possible exposure, the health department recommends that you watch your child for signs and symptoms of the disease.

This notification contains specific information about the disease and how you can protect yourself and your family.

What is varicella?

Varicella is an infectious disease caused by a virus. Before the vaccine became available, it was responsible for 3.7 million cases/year, 10,000 hospitalizations and 100 deaths, about 40 of whom were children.

How is varicella spread?

Varicella is spread person-to-person through airborne contact, droplet contact or direct contact of vesicle fluid or secretions of respiratory tract. This can be through coughing, sneezing or contact with objects soiled with saliva of an infected person.

What are the symptoms of varicella?

The illness begins with a fever and malaise for 1 to 2 days followed by blister-like rash breakouts. Symptoms usually appear 14-16 days after exposure, but can take as long as 21 days. Although the course of illness is usually mild and not life-threatening to healthy children, it may be severe in infants, adults and persons with impaired immune systems. In some cases, chickenpox may cause more serious illness and may even lead to death.

How do I protect myself against varicella?

The best way to prevent varicella is to make sure you are up to date with your shots. It is now recommended that all children and adults who have not had the disease receive two doses of varicella vaccine. If you are not sure whether you have received varicella vaccine, you should contact your primary care provider.

Other things that can be done to prevent infections include covering the nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and frequent hand washing, especially after coughing or sneezing. Do not share eating and drinking utensils. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth, since fingers and hands can become contaminated and cause infection in this way.

What should I do if symptoms develop?

If your child or anyone in your household develops symptoms of varicella, you should notify your primary care provider immediately. Persons with varicella should remain at home until all lesions are dry and crusted; persons without blisters should stay home for at least 5 days.

How is varicella treated?

Currently, there is no specific treatment for varicella. Care is supportive and aimed at reducing fever and discomfort. Fevers in children should not be treated with products containing aspirin (salicylic acid), as use of these products with viral infections, like varicella, may result in a serious condition called Reye Syndrome.

How do I report cases?

Medical providers are urged to report symptomatic individuals if they suspect varicella infection and report possible cases within 24 hours to the Cook County Department of Public Health at 708-836-8699. For more information log on to: www.cookcountypublichealth.org.