

“When to Exclude Children with Chickenpox”
Interim Control Procedures for Varicella in Schools and Child Care Settings

After January 1, 2000, all children enrolled in licensed day care centers and beginning 2002/2003 school year all new entrants and all 6th grade students are required to have varicella vaccination or else evidence of immunity such as serological evidence or a physician or parent history of chickenpox. Exemptions are also permitted for children entering schools and day care centers. The number of cases of varicella which have been reported since the introduction of the vaccine has declined dramatically over previous years. It is expected that the number of cases of chickenpox reported to local health departments will decline even further with the introduction of these requirements. As varicella becomes more unusual, its surveillance and control will become very similar to that for measles. For this transition period, from large numbers of cases to very few cases (less than 1,000 per year), an interim protocol for control of varicella has been developed, which heightens awareness of varicella control without placing a significant burden upon either day care centers, schools or local health departments.

When a case of chickenpox is suspected or confirmed in a school or child care setting, the following procedures should be initiated:

1. Exclude the child(ren) or staff with active chickenpox disease from the school or child care program. Once the rash has crusted over, the child or staff member is no longer infectious and may return to the program.
2. Other children and staff need not be excluded at this time.
3. School or child care program staff should consider a record search on all children attending the program to determine which children may be susceptible to chickenpox.
4. A letter should be sent home to all parents of children attending the program, notifying them of a case of chickenpox at the program, and of the benefits of immunizing their unprotected children who are at least 12 months of age. A draft letter is posted on the accesskent.com website.
5. The school or child care program should notify the local health department, who will be able to provide consultation to the program should it be needed, as well as advise on the local availability of varicella vaccine.

If you have any questions about this protocol, please call the Kent County Health Department Communicable Disease Unit at (616) 632-7228.