

County of Napa Health and Human Services Agency



Public Health Division

Health Alert

February 25, 2008

Dear Healthcare Provider,

Recently, the Napa County Public Health Division has received reports of 8 cases of chickenpox, varicella-zoster virus, in elementary and middle school age children. Cases reported to date have occurred among children attending two schools within the city of Napa. As a result of this outbreak, physicians and other healthcare providers in Napa are advised to be alert for new cases of chickenpox.

The varicella-zoster virus is transmitted through airborne droplets and direct contact with lesions. Patients are infectious 1-2 days before and 4-5 days after the onset of a maculopapulovesicular rash. The incubation period is 14-16 days with a range of 10-21 days. Patients usually present with a mild prodrome for 1-2 days followed by a rash generally appearing first on the head and then becoming most concentrated on trunk. Other symptoms include high fever, itching, headache, and dehydration.

Complications of varicella include: bacterial infection of skin lesions, CNS manifestations and viral or bacterial pneumonia. On average there are 3-4 hospitalizations per 1,000 cases and 1 death per 60,000 cases. Groups at increased risk of complications include healthy adults, immunocompromised persons, pregnant women, and newborns of women with rash onset within 5 days before to 2 days after delivery.

Prior to introduction of the varicella vaccine in 1995, there were approximately 11,000 hospitalizations and 100-150 deaths due to chickenpox annually. Since July 1, 2001 varicella vaccination has been required for all children entering elementary school (1 dose or physician documented history of disease) under California law. Vaccination with two doses of varicella vaccine prevents chickenpox in most people. Approximately 15-20% of people who receive one dose of varicella vaccine will contract chickenpox if exposed; this illness is typically mild, with fewer than 50 blisters. Widespread use of the vaccine has resulted in a 90% decline in chickenpox deaths among children ages 1-4.

Please report cases of chickenpox to:

Napa County Public Health Division

Tel: (707) 299 -1499 Fax: (707) 299-4479

Tel after hours: (707) 265-3131 (diseases requiring immediate notification only)

Sincerely,

Karen Smith, MD, MPH Public Health Officer

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