



DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Promoting and protecting health, well-being, self-sufficiency, and safety of all in Marin County.



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PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY
Suspected Cases of Pediatric Varicella

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Marin County Public Health has recently received reports of 3 cases of varicella (chickenpox) in children enrolled in a Mill Valley school. One case has been established by the treating pediatrician while the other cases are self-reports from the parents of the children. The children are 5 years old. The symptom onset of the initial case was January 26, 2012. The second and third cases had reported onsets of February 7, 2012 and February 9, 2012. No reports of hospitalization or complications have been received in any of the cases.

The varicella (chickenpox) vaccination histories of the three cases are notable. Two of the children had received no prior vaccinations for chickenpox based on parental “opt outs” for personal beliefs. The third case had received one dose of vaccine at age one but had not yet received the recommended second dose (age 4-6).

California is one of several states which allow personal belief exemptions (PBE) from legislated mandates for childhood vaccinations. The number of children in California schools whose parents have opted out of required vaccinations is increasing. In 2010 about 2.5% of the state’s kindergarteners were exempted from one or more vaccines, the highest rate seen since 1978. Furthermore, Marin County kindergarten entrants have one of the highest rates of exemptions in the state. In 2010, 7.1% of Marin children entering kindergarten exercised a PBE against one or more of the recommended vaccines.

Unvaccinated children are at risk for contracting this common illness and its serious complications such as encephalitis and pneumonia. As noted in state data, “opt out” school children appear in clusters, whether in individual schools or small communities. The presence of numerous unvaccinated children in contact with one another creates the opportunity for rapid transmission and high attack rates.

Attached below you will find helpful links that provide information about signs, symptoms, management and prevention against chickenpox in children. We have also provided links to a recent article about parental ‘opt out’ of vaccinations in California school children.

Links:

- <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/healthinfo/discond/Pages/Varicella.aspx>
- [http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/immunize/Documents/B.%20Varicella_Quicksheet%20\(CDPH\)2-07.pdf](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/immunize/Documents/B.%20Varicella_Quicksheet%20(CDPH)2-07.pdf)
- <http://emedicine.medscape.com/article/969773-overview#a0101>

Article:

- <http://www.californiahealthline.org/articles/2011/9/26/thousands-of-children-starting-school-without-getting-vaccines.aspx>

Contact the Marin Department of Public Health with any questions at (415) 473-4163.