



Health Alert



City of Chicago
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Chicago Department of Public Health
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Increase in Varicella in Chicago: Updated Vaccine Guidance — HAN #2

December 22, 2023

Summary and Action Items

- New arrival children ages 1–4 years, especially if residing in a shelter, should receive 2 doses of varicella vaccine as long as 3 months have elapsed between doses.
- Clinicians who diagnose varicella within healthcare settings should notify their institution's infection prevention team.
- Clinicians should continue using every opportunity to make sure patients are up to date on vaccinations, including varicella, influenza, and COVID-19

Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) continues to detect high levels of varicella (chickenpox), especially among people who have recently arrived in Chicago from the U.S. Southern Border (“new arrivals”) and who are living in congregate settings (see [previous HAN](#)).

CDPH and other mobile providers have been conducting on-site events to administer varicella vaccines and provide education. As of 12/20/2023, providers have conducted 17 events at 6 shelters, and have administered 227 doses of varicella vaccine to shelter residents.

OUTBREAK VACCINE RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) [routine guidance](#) for varicella vaccine administration, a first dose should be administered at age 12 through 15 months, and a second dose at age 4 through 6 years. **However, during varicella outbreaks among preschool-aged children, [CDC recommends](#) a 2-dose vaccination for optimal protection.**

- Children ages 1–4 years who are part of Chicago's new arrival population—especially those residing in a congregate setting—should receive a second “early” varicella vaccine dose, provided a minimum interval of 3 months has elapsed after first dose.
- For children ages 4–12 years who have no history of varicella immunity, the minimum interval between doses is also 3 months.
- For people 13 years and older with no history of varicella immunity, the minimum interval between doses is 4 weeks.

Providers should continue to use every opportunity to ensure all patients are up to date on their vaccinations, including varicella. The upcoming school break may provide additional opportunities to ensure that school-aged children are up to date. In addition to varicella, CDPH has detected increased activity of influenza and COVID-19. To prevent secondary transmission of varicella and other infectious diseases within schools, maintaining high rates of vaccine coverage among Chicago's pediatric population is critical.

REPORTING AND INFECTION CONTROL

Both clinically and laboratory-diagnosed cases of varicella should be reported to CDPH within 24 hours. If you have access to I-NEDSS (Illinois Notifiable Electronic Disease Surveillance System), please report via that electronic system. For all others, use the [Online Case Reporting Form](#) (preferred) or contact the CDPH Disease Reporting Hotline at 312-743-9000.

Clinicians should notify their institution's infection prevention team upon diagnosis of varicella within healthcare settings (i.e. emergency rooms, hospitals, clinics). Infection prevention teams should provide recommendations to mitigate disease transmission to high-risk individuals and healthcare staff without evidence of immunity within these settings.