

Draft letter to parents whose children attend a school or child care program when chickenpox has occurred

Dear Parent/Caregiver,

A child who attends the _____ (name of the school or child care center/program) has been diagnosed with chickenpox. Although this is usually not a serious illness, it often causes children to miss days at school/child care/pre-school while they have a rash, and parents may miss work to stay at home with their ill child. In some children, chickenpox may cause more serious illness, leading to a stay in the hospital or even death.

The varicella vaccine can prevent chickenpox (the varicella vaccine) and is safe and effective for children who are 12 months of age or older. This vaccine is recommended by pediatricians and the Centers for Disease Control for all children who have never had the chickenpox; it is now part of a child's routine vaccination schedule. The varicella vaccine series consists of two doses given at least 3 months apart (at least 4 weeks apart for persons 13 years of age or older).

If your child has already been vaccinated against chickenpox, please make certain the immunization record information has been given to the school/day care program, so that this may be included in their school health record.

If your child has not already had chickenpox and has not been vaccinated with the chickenpox vaccine (or has received only 1 vaccine dose), we recommend that he/she receive the vaccine. The vaccine, if given 3-5 days after exposure to chickenpox disease, can prevent illness or reduce its severity. Your child's doctor or the local health department can assist in vaccinating children who are not protected against chickenpox.

There are a few children with weakened immune systems who should not receive the vaccine, and your child's health care provider will be able to advise you what to do if you child has exposure to chickenpox. A medicine is available (VZIG) which can protect children and adults with weakened immune systems and also pregnant women from chickenpox.

If your child does develop chickenpox, he/she should be kept home from the school/child care center/program until the rash has crusted over.

If you have any questions, please contact your child's doctor or the local health department at _____, and mention this letter to them.