

Grant County Health District – Always Working for a Healthier and Safer Grant County

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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- GRANT COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT -

9 Chickenpox (Varicella) Cases in Moses Lake involving 5 schools.

MOSES LAKE, WA – Public Health staff in Grant County are investigating 9 chickenpox cases in students attending the following Moses Lake schools: Longview, Lakeview, Discover, Garden Heights and Moses Lake High School. Four of the children had *only one dose* of the varicella vaccine. The other 5 children *had no doses*.

Each year in the U.S. before vaccine became available, approximately 11,000 people were hospitalized and up to 100 people died from complications of chickenpox. Chickenpox is a very contagious viral disease that can be spread by direct contact with fluid from the broken blisters or through the air by coughing or sneezing. An exposed individual who has not already had the disease has a 70% to 80% chance of catching the disease. Chickenpox poses a threat to pregnant women who are not immune to it, as the baby may not be protected from the virus; premature infants and immune compromised individuals are also at risk for complications.

Additional Outbreak Information: Two doses of vaccine are considered full immunity. Students without complete vaccination could be excluded from participation in school and school activities.

All Grant County families are encouraged to check their children's immunization records. The CDC recommends children receive 2 doses of the varicella vaccine to *obtain full immunity*.

- Your child should receive their **FIRST** chickenpox vaccine at 12-15 months of age.
- If your child is 12 months through 12 years the second dose should be given 3 months after the first dose.
- For adults and children 13 or older the second dose is can be given 4 weeks after the first dose.

Washington State law requires all children (over the age of age one) to show proof of one dose of varicella vaccine or to document immunity, or sign for an exemption to varicella vaccine for entry into licensed child care, preschool, and grades 1,2, and 6. Kindergarteners must show 2 doses of varicella vaccine; the new 2 dose rule is being phased in statewide with the addition of one grade per year. To meet requirements as this rule is implemented, parents must do any of the following:

- Demonstrate immunity by showing dates of 2-doses of varicella vaccine (appropriately spaced), received on or after the child's first birthday; OR
- Demonstrate immunity by healthcare provider's diagnosis or verification of a history of varicella disease or shingles (caused by the same virus); OR
- Demonstrate immunity by blood test (titer) showing serologic proof of immunity to varicella or herpes; OR

- Exemption from immunization based on a medical, religious or personal reason. (Students who have been exempted from vaccines, as well as any others who do not demonstrate immunity may be excluded from participating in school and school activities, in order to control school-based transmission of disease.)

Parent report of varicella disease is not acceptable in any grade levels that have the 2-dose vaccine requirement.

Visit <http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/Immunize/documents/varimplementplan.pdf> for more information.

Anyone with a rash illness should not be at school, work, or out in the public until cleared by their healthcare provider.

Please call first if you are seeking care for a rash illness, so that the healthcare provider or facility can be prepared with a mask and any other necessary precautions.

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