



For Immediate Release

For More Information Contact:
Kurt Koopmann
Public Information Officer
Galveston County Health District
(409) 938-2211
(409) 392-0007 - Cell
kkoopman@gchd.org

October 1, 2007

Health Advisory Issued for Barber Middle School

La Marque – Officials with the Galveston County Health District are investigating a cluster of reported chickenpox cases at the Dickinson Independent School District's Barber Middle School. DISD notified the Health District on October 1st after eleven students became ill with the highly contagious disease since late August.

Chickenpox is a disease caused by infection with the varicella-zoster virus. The virus causes blister-like rashes on the skin, usually on the face, scalp or body. High fever, itching, dehydration or headache may also occur. Chicken pox is spread from person-to-person by coughing and sneezing, by direct contact, and by aerosolization of virus from skin lesions.

Health officials say there is no cause for alarm by the general public. The outbreak appears to be confined to students at the middle school where parents are being notified by the Galveston County Health District Epidemiologist today.

The illness has an incubation period of 2 to 3 weeks, commonly 14-16 days. Typically it is infectious as long as 5 days before the onset of a rash and a person remains infectious until all blisters have formed scabs.

Chickenpox (Varicella) vaccine is the best way to prevent the disease. Vaccination not only protects vaccinated persons, it also reduces the risk for

exposure in the community for persons unable to be vaccinated because of illness or other conditions, including those who may be at greater risk for severe disease.

While no vaccine is 100% effective in preventing disease, the chickenpox vaccine is very effective: about 8 to 9 of every 10 people who are vaccinated are completely protected from chickenpox. In addition, the vaccine almost always prevents against severe disease. If a vaccinated person does get chickenpox, it is usually a very mild case lasting only a few days and involving fewer skin lesions (usually less than 50), mild or no fever, and few other symptoms.

Currently, two doses of vaccine are recommended for children, adolescents, and adults. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the doses at one and four years of age.

Currently all children and adults should receive the chickenpox vaccine unless they can prove evidence of immunity.

The Health District and school districts are accustomed to seeing a few cases of chickenpox but there has not been a school-based outbreak in the last several years.

Actions being taken by the Galveston County Health District Epidemiologist to prevent further spread of chickenpox include the following:

- Investigating the case to determine who was exposed and to determine the source of infection if possible
- Visiting the school to begin auditing immunization records, and look at other information to help reduce the spread of new infection.
- Notifying parents of signs and symptoms and recommending they see a healthcare provider to assess their child's vaccination status and possibility of disease
- Alerting the medical community to maintain an awareness for chickenpox infections and to report suspected or confirmed cases to (409) 938-2322 or (409) 938-2208
- Recommend strict personal hygiene as good hand washing is the most important thing as far as preventing illness
- Recommending that children who may be exposed or who may have early symptoms seek medical care and not return to school until released by a healthcare provider

For more information on chickenpox visit the CDC web site at:
http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/list_varicl.htm

