October 21, 2014

RE: Chickenpox Alert
NOTICE: NRRT 270 and EAP 150 classes

A student taking these classes at Colorado State University has been diagnosed with chickenpox, also known as varicella.

If you have not had chickenpox disease or have not received 2 doses of varicella vaccine, we recommend you seek the attention of a health care provider. Typically, chickenpox vaccine (also known as varicella vaccine) is recommended for persons 12 months of age or older who have not had chickenpox. Two doses of varicella vaccine are recommended, with the first dose given at 12-15 months of age and the second dose given at 4 to 6 years of age. Varicella vaccination (or an exemption to vaccination) is required for children of certain ages or grade levels to attend school or childcare in Colorado.

Chickenpox is a highly contagious viral illness characterized by a skin rash of itchy, blister-like lesions. Often there is a fever before the rash. Chickenpox is usually not serious, however, it may cause more severe illness in some high-risk individuals such as infants, pregnant women who are not immune to chickenpox, persons who have weakened immune systems because of illness or medications, and persons with chronic skin or lung disorders. Chickenpox is spread easily from person to person through the air by coughing and sneezing or by direct contact with the fluid from a chickenpox lesion. It usually takes 14 to 16 days to develop chickenpox symptoms after being exposed to someone with chickenpox, but symptoms may appear 10 to 21 days after exposure.

Some persons who have received varicella vaccine may still get chickenpox, but it is usually milder. The rash is less severe (sometimes only a few red bumps that look like insect bites) and there may be no fever in vaccinated individuals with chickenpox.

If varicella vaccine is given within three days of exposure to chickenpox, and possibly up to five days after exposure, it may prevent chickenpox or reduce the severity of disease. We recommend you contact your health care provider, private physician, or CSU Health Network, as soon as possible to obtain a varicella vaccine if you have not had chickenpox disease or have not received 2 doses of varicella vaccine.

If you develop chickenpox, you should not attend school until the rash has crusted over or formed scabs. Please notify school personnel that you have chickenpox so proper accommodations can be made.

If you have any questions:

Colorado State University students, please contact the following for questions:
• Jeannine Riess, Public Health Administrator, CSU Environmental Health Svcs, (970) 491-6121
• Beverly Earley, RN, CSU Health Network, (970) 491-1778

All others, please contact the Larimer County Health Department at 970-498-6700.
• Chickenpox fact sheet attached
FACT SHEET
CHICKENPOX (Varicella), SHINGLES (Herpes zoster)

AGENT: Varicella-zoster virus (VZV), a member of the herpesvirus family.

DESCRIPTION
Chickenpox is a highly contagious viral illness characterized by fever, fatigue, and an itchy rash. The rash begins as small flat spots, becomes blister-like for 3 or 4 days, and then scabs over. Several crops of blisters will appear over a 2 to 4 day period. The rash tends to occur more on the trunk than on the extremities and may appear on the scalp and inside the mouth. The virus remains inactive in the person’s nerve cells after chickenpox resolves, and reactivation can occur later in life resulting in shingles.

INCUBATION PERIOD
Chickenpox: 10 to 21 days (usually 14 to 16 days); Shingles: variable

HOW CAN THE INFECTION BE SPREAD?
Chickenpox is spread through direct contact with the rash or nose/throat discharges of infected people. A person is contagious one to two days before the rash appears until all the blisters have crusted over (usually 5 days after rash onset). Contact with shingles blisters can cause chickenpox in individuals who have never had chickenpox.

SCHOOL / NURSE RESPONSIBILITY
1. REPORTING: Report cases of chickenpox to the state or local public health agency within 7 days of a suspected or confirmed diagnosis. Shingles cases do not need to be reported.
2. Referral to a health care provider is optional unless symptoms are severe.

CONTROL OF SPREAD
1. EXCLUSION: Students with chickenpox should be excluded from school until all blisters have crusted over. Students with shingles may attend school if the blisters are covered.
2. Properly dispose of articles soiled with nose/throat discharges.
3. A single dose of varicella vaccine is recommended for children aged 12 to 18 months. Susceptible adolescents (aged 13 years and older) should receive two doses. Starting in 2003, children aged 18 months through third grade must be vaccinated, have a history of chickenpox, or a vaccine exemption in order to attend child care or school. Each school year an additional grade level will be added to the requirement until 2013 when all grades (K-12) will be included.
4. Varicella vaccine administered within 3 to 5 days of exposure may prevent the disease.

TREATMENT
ASPIRIN SHOULD BE AVOIDED because it increases the risk of Reye's Syndrome, a serious disorder that can lead to coma and death. If a medicine to lower temperature or reduce discomfort is necessary, acetaminophen-containing medicines (like Tylenol) are recommended.

Source: Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, August 24, 2012