

Varicella (Chickenpox) Parent Information

December 15, 2011

Dear Parents/Guardians,

This letter is to inform our school communities in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend that there has been recent *Varicella*, or Chickenpox, activity in various counties in the State of Indiana. Fortunately, our schools have not had any cases reported. Hopefully and prayerfully, with Christmas Break upon us, the two weeks off of school will be a breaking point and give a decline in the rate of transmission. However, it is prudent for the School Wellness Ministry of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend Schools to share with you information released by the Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH):

The Indiana State Department of Health is investigating varicella (chickenpox) activity in Indiana. Sporadic cases have been reported throughout the state, including cases in schools and day cares. Although school requirements for varicella vaccination vary by grade, the CDC recommends that in outbreak situations, all school students and staff must have either history of disease or two valid doses of varicella vaccine, regardless of grade, to interrupt disease transmission. Those who do not have adequate proof of immunity (history of disease or 2 valid vaccine doses) will be excluded from classes and extracurricular activities for 21 days after the date of last known exposure, regardless of objector status.

So what this means is that currently, 2nd through 5th grades have not been required by state standards to have two chickenpox immunizations for school entry for the 2011-2012 school year. Our Pre-K students are also at risk of contracting the disease since they are only required to have one dose of varicella immunization for the 2011-2012 school year entry. Therefore, during the Christmas Break, this might be a good time to consider updating your child's varicella immunization status if you have not done so already. If you choose to get your child a varicella booster, please send in proof of immunization status to the school when classes resume so records can be updated. And if your child is in Pre-K or grades 2nd through 5th and has already received the varicella booster, please send in that documentation also. Finally, for pregnant women, please consult your obstetrician or health care provider to be instructed how best to protect you and your baby.

Our schools also have parents who object to the varicella immunization for their child/children. If you do object to the varicella immunization for religious or medical reasons (these are the only two reasons that the State of Indiana recognizes), or decide not to get your child fully immunized, then please know that if there should be an outbreak in your child's school, your child must be excluded from school and all extracurricular activities for 21 days after the **last** known exposure. This rule is directed by the Indiana State Department of Health

and the Centers for Disease Control. The Diocese is bound by law to comply with the State standards since the Diocese of Fort Wayne – South Bend is an accredited school system.

Since the varicella immunization has become a standard school immunization now, chickenpox are not as easily detectable to parents as it once was. Additional ISDH information about the varicella disease:

Early symptoms of chickenpox begin 10-21 days after exposure and include fever, tiredness, and weakness. These symptoms are followed by the appearance of flat, red spots which commonly occur first on the back and chest and continue to appear for 2 to 3 days. The spots become raised and fill with fluid, resembling blisters, and may severely itch. The fever may increase when the itchy, blister-like rash appears. Approximately five days after the rash first appears, the blisters rupture and scab over. Some people who have had only one dose of chickenpox vaccine can still get chickenpox. When this happens, the disease is often milder with fewer spots (less than 50) that may look more like insect bites than chickenpox blisters.

If you should have any questions or concerns, please consult with your child's health care practitioner. You may also contact Maureen VerVaet, RN, School Wellness Ministry, at 574-904-0233.

Sincerely,
Maureen VerVaet, RN

**The School Wellness Ministry of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend Schools
is sponsored through St. Joseph Regional Medical Center.**