



August 14, 2019

Topic: Chickenpox

Dear Colleagues,

As another school year approaches, chickenpox continues to be a health concern in Ottawa County. To limit the spread of disease within schools, daycare centers and other similar settings, all individuals diagnosed with chickenpox are excluded from school and group settings until they are no longer contagious; all unimmunized contacts without history of prior disease are excluded from school and group settings for 21 days from the date of their last exposure. Since this period of exclusion can have a significant impact on individuals and their families, and because other diseases can closely resemble chickenpox, public health authorities, including the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), are recommending laboratory confirmation of all clinically diagnosed cases of chickenpox.

Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) is the most sensitive laboratory method for confirming the diagnosis of chickenpox and is the method recommended by CDC and MDHHS. Specimens for testing can be collected from vesicular fluid, maculopapular lesions or crust from chickenpox lesions. Information on specimen collection for PCR can be found at

[www.cdc.gov/chickenpox/lab-testing/collectingspecimens.html](http://www.cdc.gov/chickenpox/lab-testing/collectingspecimens.html)

PCR testing is available at many hospital and commercial laboratories but not through MDHHS.

Chickenpox is a reportable disease in Michigan. As such, medical care providers are required by law to report all cases to the local health department. Further information on disease reporting is available at [https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdch/Varicella\\_388985\\_7.pdf](https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdch/Varicella_388985_7.pdf)

Immunity to chickenpox (including cases of mild or atypical disease) should be reported in MCIR if (1) there is laboratory confirmation of immunity or (2) if there is a history of disease after contact with a laboratory confirmed case of chickenpox (an epidemiological link).

Thank you for your cooperation. If you have any questions please contact me at 616-494-5548.

Sincerely,

Paul A. Heidel, MD, MPH  
Medical Director  
Ottawa County Department of Public Health