



HEALTH ALERT

Dear Colleagues,

As you may be aware, cases and outbreaks of chickenpox continue to occur here in Michigan. Since the diagnosis of chickenpox has significant implications for both the individual and those in contact with them, public health authorities are requesting that healthcare providers obtain laboratory confirmation of all clinically diagnosed chickenpox cases. To limit the spread of disease within schools, day care centers and other similar settings, all diagnosed cases are currently excluded from group settings until they are no longer contagious and all unimmunized contacts may be excluded from group settings for 21 days after exposure. Since there are other diseases that closely resemble chickenpox, it is important that a diagnosis of chickenpox be confirmed so that individuals are not improperly excluded from school or work.

The diagnostic test of choice for confirmation of chickenpox is the polymerase chain reaction (PCR). Please see the table below for testing information:

Preferred Test Method	Specimen(s)	Testing Logistics
PCR	Specimens may be collected from vesicular fluid, maculopapular lesions, or crusts from lesions. Specimen collection information for PCR can be found at: http://www.cdc.gov/chickenpox/lab-testing/collecting-specimens.html	Not available at MDHHS; testing is available at many hospital and commercial laboratories.

Chickenpox is a reportable disease in Michigan. Cases and outbreaks are required to be reported to your local health department. Refer to the [MDHHS Vaccine Preventable Disease Investigation Guidelines – Varicella](#).

To report immunity to chickenpox in MCIR, including those presenting with atypical and/or mild disease, the following are considered best practice:

- 1) Evidence of laboratory confirmation, OR
- 2) Contact with a laboratory confirmed chickenpox case (an epidemiologic link)

Although a healthcare provider diagnosis without the above documentation can also be entered as immunity into MCIR, it is not recommended because other diseases may mimic mild atypical chickenpox.

Sincerely,

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