



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Vanishing Varicella

Monitoring Trends in Varicella Incidence — Selected States, 2000-2010

Recorded: August 14, 2012; posted: August 16, 2012

[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Varicella, or chicken pox, is a contagious and potentially severe disease. Since the vaccine was introduced into the US, varicella is *less* common. However, a significant number of children are not fully vaccinated against the disease.

Adrianna Lopez is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases. She's joining us today to discuss the importance of getting children vaccinated against varicella. Welcome to the show, Adrianna.

[Ms. Lopez] Thank you.

[Dr. Gaynes] Adrianna, how much has chicken pox decreased since the vaccine was approved?

[Ms. Lopez] The vaccine was approved for use in the United States in 1996, and since then, we've seen about an 80 percent decline in the number of cases.

[Dr. Gaynes] How is varicella transmitted?

[Ms. Lopez] Varicella is very contagious and spreads easily through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It can also be spread by touching or breathing the virus particles that are found in the blisters of a person who has chicken pox.

[Dr. Gaynes] Who should get the varicella vaccine?

[Ms. Lopez] The varicella vaccine is recommended for children who should get two doses, with the first dose given at 12 to 15 months of age and the second at 4 to 6 years of age. Adolescents and adults who have never had chicken pox disease and have never had chicken pox vaccine should also get two doses, given at least 28 days apart.

[Dr. Gaynes] Adriana, can you still get chicken pox if you've had the vaccine?

[Ms. Lopez] Most people who have had the vaccine will not develop chicken pox. However, some people can still get chicken pox if they've been vaccinated. But if they do get chicken pox, the disease will be milder than if they had not gotten vaccinated.

[Dr. Gaynes] So, what are the symptoms of chicken pox?

[Ms. Lopez] In unvaccinated persons, the symptoms of chicken pox include fever, a rash that starts with bumps and then leads to blisters. It generally has 250 to 500 lesions, or blisters, and they can be very itchy. In vaccinated persons, the disease is much milder. You generally don't have fever and you have about 50 or less than 50 bumps and they don't generally progress to blisters; they look more like bug bites.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about the varicella vaccine?

[Ms. Lopez] Listeners can go to www.cdc.gov/chickenpox, and 'chickenpox' is one word.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Adrianna. I've been talking today with CDC's Adrianna Lopez about the importance of getting your children vaccinated against varicella.

Remember, to get the best protection, CDC recommends two doses of the vaccine; the first at 12 to 15 months of age and again at 4 to 6 years. If your child hasn't gotten both doses or is past the recommended ages, talk to your health care provider about a catch-up vaccine.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.