



**STATE OF HAWAII
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In reply, please refer to:
File:

January 30, 2026 (updated February 2, 2026)

**MEDICAL ADVISORY: VARICELLA (CHICKENPOX) CLUSTER IN KAUAI ISLAND
RESIDENTS**

- Hawaii Department of Health (HDOH) has a confirmed cluster of varicella cases at an elementary school on the North shore of Kauai Island.
- Providers should be vigilant to the possibility of varicella in persons presenting with signs and symptoms clinically compatible with varicella.
- For close contacts to a person with varicella who have not been previously infected or vaccinated, varicella vaccine can be given as post-exposure prophylaxis within three to five days after exposure to prevent infection.
- Exposed high-risk individuals who are not immune and are ineligible for vaccination must be offered immediate post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) with Varicella-Zoster Immune Globulin (VariZIG). This includes pregnant women, newborns, and immunocompromised individuals.
- Review all routine childhood immunizations in patients, including vaccination against varicella and encourage eligible persons to get vaccinated if not up to date.
- Exclude persons with varicella from school or work until all lesions have crusted over.

Dear Healthcare Providers:

The Hawaii Department of Health (HDOH) has confirmed four cases of varicella (chickenpox) in students at Kilauea Elementary School on the island of Kauai. One household member of a student was also confirmed to have varicella. The elementary school is working closely with HDOH and will continue to monitor the situation closely as this is considered an outbreak of chickenpox.

Varicella is an acute infectious disease manifesting as a generalized, pruritic, vesicular rash in varying stages of development and resolution (crusting). Symptoms of varicella may include mild prodrome of fever and malaise that occur one to two days before rash onset, particularly in adults. In children, the rash is often the first sign of disease. The rash progresses rapidly from macules to papules to vesicular lesions before crusting. These rashes usually appear first on the head, chest, and back, and then spread to the rest of the body. In healthy children, varicella is generally mild, with an itchy rash, malaise, and temperature up to 102°F for two to three days.

Close contacts to a person with varicella or who may have been exposed in an outbreak setting, and who have not previously had varicella infection or vaccine, are at risk for developing the disease. They can be administered varicella vaccine as post-exposure prophylaxis within three to five days after exposure to prevent infection.

People who are at increased risk for severe disease if they develop varicella infection:

- Pregnant women, immuno-compromised persons, children less than one year old, older adolescents, adults, patients with chronic skin or pulmonary disorders, and patients receiving steroids or chronic aspirin therapy are more likely to experience serious complications with chickenpox. The risk is especially high when steroids, such as prednisone and cortisone, are given during the incubation period for chickenpox.
- Infants born to women who developed chickenpox within a period of five day before delivery to two days after delivery are at high risk of severe chickenpox, which can be fatal. Congenital varicella syndrome, characterized by developmental abnormalities, encephalitis, mental retardation, and low birthweight, may occur among 0.4 – 2.0% of infants born to women infected with chickenpox
- These individuals, if they are non-immune, are at high risk of severe varicella disease and its complications including pneumonia and encephalitis. They should be offered post-exposure prophylaxis immediately. If not eligible for varicella vaccine, VariZIG can be administered to protect them from severe disease. For details about VariZIG administration see: [PRESCRIBING INFORMATION](#). The HDOH does not have supply of VariZIG. Providers can order from this link: [Ordering and Reimbursement of VariZIG](#)

[Laboratory testing](#) can be performed any time varicella is suspected and is especially helpful in persons at high risk for severe disease or in atypical presentations such as breakthrough varicella.

Testing methods include:

- Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR): The PCR can detect Varicella Zoster Virus (VZV) DNA rapidly and sensitively in skin lesions (vesicles, scabs, maculopapular lesions). Testing is available at most commercial laboratories.
- Serologic tests: IgM serologic testing is considerably less sensitive than PCR testing of skin lesions. IgM serology provides evidence for a recent active VZV infection. However, it cannot distinguish between primary infection and reinfection or reactivation from latency.

Varicella Vaccination:

- The HDOH recommends two doses of varicella (chickenpox) vaccine for children, adolescents, and adults to protect against varicella. Children are routinely recommended to receive the first dose at age 12 through 15 months and the second dose at age 4 through 6 years old.
- Being vaccinated with the Varicella vaccine is the best way to protect your patients and to prevent an outbreak. Vaccination for those who have never had the disease or never been vaccinated are important. Vaccinations may be effective in preventing disease if performed within three to five days of exposure.

Treatment:

While most varicella infections are resolved with supportive care, **oral acyclovir or valacyclovir** treatment can be considered for certain groups at increased risk for moderate-to-severe

MEDICAL ADVISORY: Varicella (Chickenpox) Cluster in Kauai Island Residents

January 30, 2026

Page 3

varicella. Some healthcare providers may choose to use oral acyclovir or valacyclovir for secondary cases within a household. For maximum benefit, oral acyclovir or valacyclovir therapy should be given within the first 24 hours after the varicella rash starts.

Report varicella infections diagnosed clinically or by laboratory testing to the Department of Health. Varicella is a ROUTINE CATEGORY NOTIFIABLE CONDITION and can be reported by calling:

Oahu (Disease Reporting Line)(808) 586-4586
Maui District Health Office(808) 984-8213
Kauai District Health Office(808) 241-3563
Hawaii District Health Office (Hilo)(808) 933-0912
Hawaii District Health Office (Kona)(808) 322-4877
After hours on Oahu(808) 600-3625
After hours on neighbor islands(800) 360-2575 (toll free)

We appreciate your assistance in protecting the health of Hawaii's residents.

Sincerely,



Sarah K. Kemble, M.D.
State Epidemiologist

Additional Resources

- CDC Chickenpox PHP Laboratories Index: [Laboratory Testing for Varicella-Zoster Virus \(VZV\) | Chickenpox \(Varicella\) | CDC](#)