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**DOH ADVISES PUBLIC TO TAKE PROTECTIVE ACTIONS IN
RESPONSE TO CHICKENPOX OUTBREAK AT KAUA'I ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL**

26-011

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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KAUA'I, Hawai'i — The Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH) is investigating an outbreak of chickenpox (varicella) at Kīlauea Elementary School on the island of Kaua'i. Five cases have been reported in the outbreak to date, including four students at the school and one household member. All five cases were not vaccinated against chickenpox.

The DOH recommends community members get vaccinated against chickenpox if they have not previously had the disease or been vaccinated against it. Those who were in close contact with a case should seek medical advice to learn about their best options for protection.

While chickenpox usually will resolve on its own with supportive care, some people who get chickenpox can have more severe symptoms and may be at risk for complications. Chickenpox can also be serious, even life-threatening, especially during pregnancy, in babies, adolescents, adults and people with weakened immune systems.

The chickenpox vaccine is the best protection against getting chickenpox and having severe outcomes of the disease. Everyone — including children, adolescents and adults — should get two doses of chickenpox vaccine if they have never had chickenpox or were never vaccinated. Most people who get the vaccine will not get chickenpox. Those few who do get chickenpox despite vaccination generally have milder symptoms than if they were unvaccinated.

Some individuals who are ineligible for chickenpox vaccination but who may be at high risk — pregnant women, infants and people with certain immunocompromising conditions — should talk to their healthcare provider immediately if they are exposed. Other options are available to protect these vulnerable groups, but must be given promptly to be effective.

Chickenpox is a highly contagious disease caused by the varicella-zoster virus (VZV). The classic symptom of chickenpox is a rash that turns into itchy, fluid-filled blisters that eventually turn into scabs. The rash may first show up on the chest, back and face, before it spreads to the rest of the body. A person with chickenpox may have as many as 500 blisters. It usually takes about one week for all of the blisters to become scabs. Shingles, a painful/itchy rash, is a late complication of chickenpox that can occur many years after infection.

Chickenpox spreads easily through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It can also spread by touching an infected person's blisters. A person with chickenpox can spread the disease from one to two days before the rash appears until all their rash blisters have formed scabs.

For more information, visit the DOH chickenpox information page at https://health.hawaii.gov/docd/disease_listing/chickenpox-varicella-zoster/

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