



This is an official DHEC Health Advisory

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Potential for the Resurgence of Vaccine Preventable Diseases

Summary

Two varicella outbreaks, the first in South Carolina since 2020, were reported in early March. The first was reported on March 4, 2022, in the Lowcountry Region in a childcare setting. The second varicella outbreak was reported in the Upstate Region on March 10, 2022, in an elementary school. As part of disease control measures to prevent additional varicella spread in school and childcare settings, unvaccinated individuals must be excluded from the outbreak setting. For the current two outbreaks, over 50 individuals have been excluded from childcare and school attendance due to being unvaccinated for varicella, related to religious exemption or ineligibility due to age.

This Health Advisory is intended to increase awareness of emerging circumstances, including the reported varicella outbreaks, and a decline in childhood vaccination coverage that indicate the need for enhanced efforts to maintain recommended vaccination coverage and maintaining herd immunity to protect those who are ineligible for vaccinations due to age or medical conditions.

Decreasing rates for routine childhood vaccinations create the potential for the resurgence of vaccine preventable diseases and outbreaks of varicella, pertussis, measles and other diseases. Per data collected by DHEC from the [45-day School Immunization Assessment](#), the percent of school children with a valid immunization certificate decreased from 98.1% in 2014-2015 to 95.7% in 2021-2022. For more information, visit the DHEC website: [childcare and school-required vaccines](#). For highly transmissible diseases like measles, large outbreaks have occurred in populations with less than 95% coverage.

Additionally, in recent years, the number of exemptions from school vaccination requirements have increased in South Carolina. During the past 8 years, the number of children in South Carolina public and private K12 schools with a religious exemption has nearly tripled from about 5,826 students in the 2014-2015 school year to about 15,964 students in the 2021-2022 school year, an increase of approximately 10,000 students.

The current data on vaccination exemptions and reports of the recent varicella outbreaks are a reminder of the importance of maintaining childhood vaccinations. COVID-19 prevention measures were successful in preventing the spread of other infectious diseases. As COVID-19 cases are in decline and prevention activities to mitigate COVID-19 are stopped, the resurgence of other vaccine preventable diseases remains a public health concern.

Guidance for Providers

- Unvaccinated individuals exposed to varicella must be excluded from school or childcare for two incubation periods, 21 days, or they may return to group settings once they have received one dose of age-appropriate varicella vaccine. Those who are ineligible due to age or medical condition, must complete the exclusion period. More information about exclusion of individuals with certain infectious conditions can be found in the [DHEC School and Childcare Exclusion List](#).
- Report febrile rash illnesses to your regional Public Health Office in the timeframe indicated on the [List of Reportable Conditions \(pdf\)](#).
- Be familiar with vaccination and exclusion requirements for vaccine preventable diseases in persons attending school and childcare.
- Providers of vaccinations for children are encouraged to use every medical appointment as an opportunity to review patients' vaccination status and recommend the maintenance of routine vaccination schedules.
 - Health care providers play perhaps the most important role in promoting vaccination and ensuring its acceptance by parents and patients. Many studies have indicated that a strong recommendation by a health care provider is a powerful motivator for patients to agree to receive immunizations. **A recommendation from a health care provider remains the number one reason parents decide to vaccinate.** Studies show a parent who receives a recommendation from their child's health care provider is four to five times more likely to get the HPV vaccine for their child.⁶
 - A systematic review of interventions to improve vaccination uptake found strong evidence for: point-of-care reminders, reminder-recall communications, and standing orders.⁷

Resources for Additional Information

1. DHEC School Vaccination Coverage and Exemption Data by County (2017-2021):
<https://scdhec.gov/health/vaccinations/childcare-school-vaccine-requirements/school-vaccination-coverage-exemption-data-county-2016-2020>
2. DHEC Childcare & School Vaccine Requirements:
<https://scdhec.gov/health/vaccinations/childcare-school-vaccine-requirements>
3. DHEC 2021-2022 School Law Letter:
https://scdhec.gov/sites/default/files/media/document/2021-22_School_Law_Letter-signed.pdf
4. DHEC School and Childcare Exclusion List:
<https://scdhec.gov/health/child-teen-health/school-exclusion>
5. DHEC List of Reportable Conditions:
<https://scdhec.gov/sites/default/files/Library/CR-009025.pdf>
6. Bjork, Adam and Valerie Morelli. Immunization Strategies for Healthcare Practices and Providers. *Epidemiology and Prevention of Vaccine-Preventable Diseases*, 14th Edition, 2021. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/pinkbook/downloads/strat.pdf>. Accessed March 14, 2021.
7. Jacobson, R.M., et al. Vaccine Hesitancy. *Mayo Clin Proc.*, vol. 90, no. 11, 2015, pp. 1562-1568. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.mayocp.2015.09.006>

DHEC contact information for reportable diseases and reporting requirements

Reporting of vaccine preventable diseases (i.e., varicella, pertussis, measles, mumps) is consistent with South Carolina Law requiring the reporting of diseases and conditions to your state or local public health department. (State Law # 44-29-10 and Regulation # 61-20) as per the DHEC 2022 List of Reportable Conditions available at:

<https://www.scdhec.gov/sites/default/files/Library/CR-009025.pdf>

Federal HIPAA legislation allows disclosure of protected health information, without consent of the individual, to public health authorities to collect and receive such information for the purpose of preventing or controlling disease. (HIPAA 45 CFR §164.512).

| Regional Public Health Offices – 2022 | | | |
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| Mail or call reports to the Epidemiology Office in each Public Health Region | | | |
| MAIL TO: | | | |
| <u>Lowcountry</u> 4050 Bridge View Drive, Suite 600 N. Charleston, SC 29405 Fax: (843) 953-0051 | <u>Midlands</u> 2000 Hampton Street Columbia, SC 29204 Fax: (803) 576-2993 | <u>Pee Dee</u> 1931 Industrial Park Road Conway, SC 29526 Fax: (843) 915-6506 | <u>Upstate</u> 200 University Ridge Greenville, SC 29602 Fax: (864) 282-4373 |
| CALL TO: | | | |
| <u>Lowcountry</u> Allendale, Bamberg, Beaufort, Berkeley, Calhoun, Charleston, Colleton, Dorchester, Hampton, Jasper, Orangeburg Office: (843) 441-1091 Nights/Weekends: (843) 441-1091 | <u>Midlands</u> Aiken, Barnwell, Chester, Edgefield, Fairfield, Kershaw, Lancaster, Lexington, Newberry, Richland, Saluda, York Office: (888) 801-1046 Nights/Weekends: (888) 801-1046 | <u>Pee Dee</u> Clarendon, Chesterfield, Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Georgetown, Horry, Lee, Marion, Marlboro, Sumter, Williamsburg Office: (843) 915-8886 Nights/Weekends: (843) 409-0695 | <u>Upstate</u> Abbeville, Anderson, Cherokee, Greenville, Greenwood, Laurens, McCormick, Oconee, Pickens, Spartanburg, Union Office: (864) 372-3133 Nights/Weekends: (864) 423-6648 |
| For information on reportable conditions, see https://www.scdhec.gov/ReportableConditions | | <u>DHEC Bureau of Communicable Disease Prevention & Control</u> Division of Acute Disease Epidemiology 2100 Bull St • Columbia, SC 29201 Phone: (803) 898-0861 • Fax: (803) 898-0897 Nights / Weekends: 1-888-847-0902 | |

Categories of Health Alert messages:

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| Health Alert | Conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention. |
| Health Advisory | Provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action. |
| Health Update | Provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action. |
| Info Service | Provides general information that is not necessarily considered to be of an emergent nature. |