



Buncombe County Health & Human Services

Stoney Blevins
Health & Human Services Director

9/8/2023

Dear Warren Wilson Staff Member,

Buncombe County Health & Human Services (BCHHS) has been notified that a student at Warren Willson College is suspected of having chickenpox. Chickenpox is very easily passed from one person to another. Although it is usually a mild illness, it often causes people to miss days at school or work. In some people – especially children younger than 1 year of age, adolescents, adults, those with weakened immune systems, and pregnant persons – chickenpox may cause more serious illness. However, even healthy children and adults can develop serious complications from chickenpox.

Please be aware that you could get chickenpox if you have not been immunized against chickenpox and have not had chickenpox before. It is also possible for people who have been fully immunized against chickenpox or who have had chickenpox previously to get a milder case of chickenpox if they are exposed to chickenpox again.

Please read the information about chickenpox included with this letter. **If you have symptoms of chickenpox, stay home and call your healthcare provider.** Calling ahead helps prevent spread of infection to high-risk individuals who may be in the provider's office. **If you have chickenpox, you must stay home until all of your sores have crusted over and you feel better.**

If five (5) or more cases of chickenpox are diagnosed at Warren Wilson College, the school will be in a chickenpox outbreak per Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance. Proof of immunity to chickenpox may be required for students and staff if outbreak status is reached. Per CDC guidance, during an outbreak, students or staff without proof of immunity to chickenpox should be excluded from the school until 21 days after their last exposure to chickenpox.

Proof of immunity to chickenpox can be demonstrated in one (1) of the following ways:

- Having been born in the United States before 1980 (*unless pregnant or immunocompromised*)
- Documentation of two (2) doses of the chickenpox (varicella) vaccine
- Signed documentation from a healthcare provider (physician, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant) verifying a history of typical chickenpox illness or herpes zoster (shingles)
- Blood test results that indicate immunity to chickenpox -- Blood tests can be arranged with your healthcare provider. It can take several days for test results.
- Laboratory confirmation of varicella or herpes zoster illness (e.g., testing done at the time of illness that shows the presence of varicella zoster virus in skin lesions or varicella-zoster IgM antibody in a blood specimen)

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We recommend that you act now to ensure you are up-to-date on your immunizations and/or have the required documentation. **If five (5) cases of chickenpox are identified at the school, you will be notified that an outbreak is occurring and the actions BCHHS will take to control the outbreak.**

If you have not had the chickenpox vaccine and have not been ill with chickenpox before, we strongly encourage you to get immunized as soon as possible. The sooner the vaccine is administered after exposure, the more effective it is at preventing chickenpox or reducing the severity of the illness. The vaccine is safe and effective for individuals 12 months of age or older. It is safe for someone to get the vaccine if they have already been sick with chickenpox but have no documentation to prove it.

Your healthcare provider or the BCHHS Immunization Clinic can provide you the vaccine. If you have any questions, please contact your healthcare provider or BCHHS Communicable Disease staff at 828-250-5109 and tell them about this letter.

Sincerely,
Ellis Matheson, DNP, RN
Health Director

Dr. Jennifer Mullendore
Medical Director