



Frequently Asked Questions for Schools and Health Care Providers: Varicella Requirement for High School Students

General Questions

- 1. Q:** What is the varicella (chickenpox) requirement for high school students?
A: All 9th-12th graders are required to have 2 doses of varicella vaccine to attend school. Students in kindergarten-8th grade have already been required to get 2 doses of varicella vaccine.
- 2. Q:** Why is it important for teens to get varicella vaccine? Varicella is such a mild illness.
A: Before varicella vaccine was available, there were 4 million cases of varicella per year in the U.S., and thousands of people required hospitalization. Young children, adolescents and adults who get varicella tend to have more complications. There are also more reported cases in older children and adolescents, because they are not as well immunized.
- 3. Q:** Why are high school students now required to get varicella vaccine?
A: In 2007, a national group of medical experts recommended that all children get 2 doses of varicella vaccine. Washington State implemented the requirement for 2 doses of varicella vaccine in 2008, starting with kindergarteners. The requirement has been applied to additional grades each year. In 2014, the State Board of Health made a decision to apply the requirement to kindergarten through 12th grade by school year 2016-17. The State Board of Health, which develops immunization rules in our state, made the requirement to comply with federal recommendations.
- 4. Q:** If a high school student has proof of immunity to varicella based on lab testing, what does this student need to do?
A: The healthcare provider must sign the [Certificate of Immunization Status](#) (CIS) in the Documentation of Disease Immunity box on the right hand side. The student must also get a copy of the signed lab report so they can give this documentation to the school.
- 5. Q:** Can a family submit a Certificate of Exemption and would the student be in compliance?
A: Yes, a student can request an exemption. The student would be in compliance with the requirement and not need varicella vaccine. A previous exemption submitted in another school year is also acceptable and the student would be in compliance.

Verification of Varicella Disease

- 6. Q:** If a high school student had varicella disease as a child, does he still need to get the vaccine?
A: No, if a student has a prior history of disease, then he or she doesn't need to get the vaccine. A healthcare provider must verify that the student had varicella disease by signing the CIS. If a parent notified the school that the student had varicella disease **before or during school year 2013-14**, this is also acceptable. If the parent hadn't notified the school before or during school year 2013-14, then the parent has to get verification of prior disease from a healthcare provider.
- 7. Q:** If a provider isn't willing to verify varicella in the past, what options does a student have?
A: A student can get a blood test to check for immunity, get 2 doses of vaccine, or get an exemption.

8. **Q:** Can parents let high schools know that their child had varicella in the past?
A: If a parent let school staff know **before or during school year 2013-2014** about a history of varicella disease, then this is valid. If parents now notify the high school of varicella history, this is NOT acceptable. Parents are now required to get their healthcare provider to verify that their student had varicella disease. Providers can verify this information by filling out the [Certificate of Immunization Status](#) or by providing a written letter for parents to give school staff.
9. **Q:** If a provider didn't see a child when he was sick with varicella, how can the healthcare provider now verify disease?
A: A provider may be able to verify varicella disease for the parent based on:
 - An epidemiologic link to another typical varicella case or laboratory confirmed case, **OR**
 - Get a blood test to check for immunity.
Those without an epidemiologic link or lab confirmation of varicella are not considered to have a valid history of disease. For these persons, vaccination is recommended. If a healthcare provider verifies the diagnosis based on the above criteria, vaccination is not needed.
10. **Q:** What documentation is required from the provider to verify varicella disease so the child can be in compliance with the requirement?
A: The provider can verify varicella disease by:
 - Filling out the Documentation of Disease Immunity box on the right hand side of the Certificate of Immunization Status, **OR**
 - Providing a letter that indicates the student has a history of varicella disease.
 - If the healthcare provider or school can print a CIS from the state Immunization Information System, then a provider signature isn't required.
11. **Q:** If a new high school student from another Washington state school district has only parent verification of varicella disease, does this student now need to get provider verification?
A: If the parent has documentation that they notified the school **before or during school year 2013-14**, then the parent verification is acceptable.
12. **Q:** How about new students from out of state? Do they need to get provider verification, or can the parent verify that they had varicella disease?
A: New students from out of state must get provider verification since parent verification is no longer allowed.

Immunization Information System

13. **Q:** Can schools check the Immunization Information System (IIS) for history of varicella?
A: Yes, the IIS will show a history of varicella disease. The IIS will say there is a "Contraindication" or "Patient or parent report of disease." Even though this shows "Patient or parent report of disease," accept this as valid provider verification of varicella since it's in the IIS.
14. **Q:** Can a provider enter varicella history in the state Immunization Information System?
A: Yes, to enter varicella disease history in the IIS:
 - Search for the patient.
 - On the left hand menu under **Vaccinations**, click on **View/Add**.
 - Scroll to the bottom of the screen, click on the **Add Chickenpox History** button.

- After the varicella history has been added, the IIS will show a permanent contraindication for varicella vaccine as "Patient or parent report of disease."
- This counts as provider verification of varicella disease and the student won't be required to get vaccinated or get a blood test.

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