



## NEWS RELEASE

### ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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## ADPH investigates possible chickenpox cases in Blount County

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Blount County Health Department is investigating several possible cases of chickenpox in kindergarten, first grade and second grade at Hayden Primary School. Since May 4, about 30 children have had a rash that closely resembles chickenpox. There have not been any severe complications from this rash illness.

Because most of the children have been immunized against chickenpox, the health department is doing some laboratory testing to see if chickenpox is a cause of the rash. Local physicians and health care providers have been notified to be on the lookout for suspect cases of chickenpox and are asked to call the health department to report suspected cases.

Chickenpox was once a common disease of childhood resulting in fever, headache and not feeling well followed by an itchy, blistering type of rash on the face and trunk that forms scabs over four to seven days. Complications include skin infections, pneumonia and central nervous system symptoms.

People at risk for complications from chickenpox include unvaccinated pregnant women, young infants, people with weakened immune systems, and unvaccinated adults. Vaccinated children who have what is called "breakthrough chickenpox" may have less than 50 spots, may not develop blisters, are less contagious, and are less likely to have severe complications.

A chickenpox vaccine was developed in 1995 which has been responsible for a decrease in hospitalizations and deaths from chickenpox over the past two decades. Prior to the vaccine about 100 to 150 children died from chickenpox each year in the United States. Now the death rate is about 10 patients per year. One dose of vaccine protects against chickenpox about 85 percent of the time. Two doses protect about 98 percent of the time. Chickenpox vaccine became a required vaccine for Alabama school entry in 2001.

Dr. Karen Landers, a pediatrician and Medical Consultant for the Immunization Division of the Alabama Department of Public Health, urges parents to have their children vaccinated for chickenpox at 1 year of age with a booster at 4 years of age. Older children who have not been vaccinated can be vaccinated according to the routine vaccine schedules.

“Chickenpox vaccine has been responsible for a significant decline in disease and death during the past 20 years. While some children do develop chickenpox, even when vaccinated, disease after vaccine is very mild,” Landers said.

For further information, visit [www.adph.org](http://www.adph.org), call your health care provider, or your local health department.

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5/14/15