## Chickenpox Alert

Information for <Teachers/Staff/Employees/College Students>

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This is to advise you that there have been 2 case of chickenpox at Worcester Polytechnic Institute

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### What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox, also called varicella, is a viral disease that can spread easily and quickly from person to person. The disease is most common among children under 15 years old. Serious complications are rare, but are more common in newborns, pregnant women, people with weakened immune systems, and adults.

### What are the symptoms?

People with chickenpox get an itchy rash that looks like tiny blisters. The rash usually starts on the face, stomach, chest or back, and spreads to other parts of the body. A mild fever, tiredness, and slight body discomfort usually come with the rash. Symptoms usually begin about 10 – 21 days after exposure to the virus.

### How is chickenpox spread?

Chickenpox is spread from person to person by coughing, sneezing, or touching the rash. People with chickenpox can spread the disease from 1–2 days before symptoms start until all the lesions are crusted over, which usually takes 5 days. Under state regulations, people with chickenpox must stay out of school and work and refrain from public activities until all their blisters have dried and crusted.

### Who gets chickenpox?

Anyone who has never had chickenpox and has never been vaccinated against chickenpox can get the disease. Sometimes, even people who have been vaccinated will still get chickenpox (called “breakthrough” chickenpox). Breakthrough disease is usually milder, but it is still contagious.

### How can you prevent chickenpox?

A vaccine is available to prevent chickenpox. Additionally, when people receive chickenpox vaccine within 3 (and possibly up to 5) days of being in contact with someone with chickenpox, it decreases their chances of getting chickenpox. Those who have already received one dose of chickenpox vaccine should talk with their healthcare provider about receiving a second dose of chickenpox vaccine.

### What should pregnant women or those with weakened immune systems do?

Newborns, pregnant women, and some people with weakened immune systems cannot receive chickenpox vaccine. If you have been in contact with someone with chickenpox and you do not have a history of chickenpox or are unsure, you should see a doctor immediately. You may not be able to receive the vaccine, but you may get a shot of antibodies to chickenpox called VZIG (varicella-zoster immune globulin), or intravenous immunoglobulin (IVIG) if VZIG is not available, to lower the chances of severe complications. VZIG or IVIG should be given within 96 hours of exposure.

### What should I do if I get chickenpox?

Please stay home, call your doctor and your supervisor at work. Also, keep all chickenpox lesions and other wounds clean and watch for possible signs of infection, including increasing redness, swelling, drainage and pain at the wound site. A person with an infected wound, especially if fever develops, should seek medical care. Good hand washing and covering your mouth when coughing can help prevent the spread of infections. Thoroughly wash your hands and children’s hands after wiping noses and before eating or preparing food. Do not share food, cigarettes, cups, spoons, or drinking straws.

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What should <staff, teachers, employees, college students> do?

- If you were born in the U.S. before 1980, you are probably immune to chickenpox. Even if you don’t remember having had chickenpox, you do not need to do anything at this time, unless you are pregnant (see above) or a healthcare worker (ask your supervisor).

- If you were born in or after 1980 or born outside the U.S. (regardless of year of birth), and you do not have documentation of at least 1 dose of chickenpox vaccine, serologic proof of immunity, or a history of chickenpox, you should receive a dose of chickenpox vaccine as soon as possible.
  - A history of chickenpox means that a healthcare provider diagnosed you with chickenpox or that a designated person at your workplace has verified your recollection of having had chickenpox.
  - If there is any question about whether you have had chickenpox, you should not consider yourself to be immune.

Anyone who is not immune and not vaccinated with at least one dose of chickenpox vaccine by October 5, 2008 will be excluded from class

For more information, please call your local board of health or MDPH at (617) 983-6800.

Staff should contact their local primary care provider.

Students contact WPI Health Services 508-831-5520.