



Population and Public Health
Office of the Medical Health Officers
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October 7, 2014

Dear Clinician:

**RE: New Ministry of Health Directive:
History of varicella disease is no longer accepted as proof of immunity**

We would like to inform you of a recent change in Ministry of Health policy regarding the administration of Varicella vaccine, especially to those in the Grade 6 program. According to the Ministry, "Most children in Saskatchewan no longer get chickenpox disease due the success of the Grade 6 and infant chickenpox immunization programs, as the rate of vaccine induced community immunity has increased." They also deemed diagnosed clinical disease as unreliable and unacceptable. As a result, the implications from this policy are as follows:

- Anyone born since January 1, 2003, and **all** grade 6 students in the 2014-15 school year, are eligible to receive a cohort-based varicella vaccine series unless they have documentation:
 - a. Of having previously received a cohort-based varicella vaccine series; or
 - b. Of serological evidence of immunity to the varicella zoster virus; or
 - c. Lab-confirmed evidence of disease (e.g., culture from a pox viral swab).
- Serological varicella titre testing is **not** required before immunizing someone born since January 1, 2003 and/or is currently in grade 6 who does not have any of the above documentation.
- The Ministry policy is in accordance with the current *Canadian Immunization Guide* (CIG) that notes that self-reported history of varicella disease is no longer acceptable as evidence of immunity in persons born since (January 1,) 2004. The Ministry of Health and the Standing Committee on Immunization (SCOI) are implementing this statement and applying it to persons born since January 1, 2003 and/or who are currently in grade 6.
- According to the National Advisory Committee on Immunizations (NACI) there is no harm in administering Varicella vaccine to someone who is immune (from disease or vaccine).
- People born between January 1, 1993 and December 31, 2002 who are not in grade 6, and are now unsure whether they actually had varicella disease and want to be immunized, **must have serological testing done (without exception)** and the results given to Public Health before they are immunized.
- Post-immunization serology for Varicella is not indicated.

Thank you for your understanding regarding this new change in policy and practice. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Shovita".

Dr. Shovita Padhi
MD, MPH, FRCPC
Deputy Medical Health Officer

Healthiest people ~ Healthiest communities ~ Exceptional service