

Testing for Varicella

Why testing is needed

Laboratory confirmation is recommended for all suspected cases of varicella. Testing is needed to determine appropriate clinical management and public health response. Medical presentation of hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD) is often similar to that of atypical varicella and vice versa, but the two illnesses have very different public health and exclusion recommendations. Testing helps ensure children do not miss school unnecessarily due to a misdiagnosis and to prevent outbreaks due to delayed recognition.

Testing is also needed to confirm varicella to track vaccine effectiveness. Although less common, vaccine breakthrough disease does occur and is tracked closely by the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH). When clinical diagnosis of varicella occurs without testing, public health is limited in being able to assess and track varicella vaccine effectiveness.

Free testing through MDH Public Health Laboratory

MDH provides free polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing for all suspected cases of varicella. PCR testing of specimens from lesions is the recommended test to confirm a varicella diagnosis. Results are typically available within two business days after receipt of specimen(s).

MDH updates MIIC records with any positive result, as documentation of positive results can be used as evidence of immunity.

Varicella home test kits

MDH provides free varicella home test kits that are safe and simple to use. Materials include:

- A pair of slides for collecting loose scabs/crust.
- A buccal swab.
- A consent form.

When an outbreak is suspected, MDH can send kits directly to households or to schools and child cares to distribute to families.

- Specimens collected from these kits are shipped dry allowing specimens to be sent via U.S. mail.
- Pre-paid return postage to the MDH Public Health Lab is included.

To request a varicella home test call 651-201-5414.

Reporting to MDH

Report all confirmed and suspect cases of varicella and pediatric zoster. Do not wait for laboratory confirmation to report to MDH. Information about who is required to report and how to submit reports to MDH can be found on [Reporting Varicella \(chickenpox\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/varicella/hcp/report.html) (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/varicella/hcp/report.html).

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To obtain this information in a different format, call: 651-201-5414