



Chickenpox (Varicella) Case in a Refugee from the Solwezi Refugee Settlement in Zambia

19 August 2015

Dear State Refugee Health Coordinator,

CDC has been notified of one confirmed case of chickenpox (varicella) in a refugee from the Solwezi refugee settlement in Zambia. The refugee was diagnosed on August 17th, 2015 while staying in the transit center in Lusaka, Zambia. The refugee did not have a vaccination card or history of chickenpox. The refugee was isolated along with his family. Travel for the refugee and his family has been put on hold. Infection control measures such as airborne and contact precautions have been activated in the transit center, as have surveillance for symptoms of chickenpox. While we suspect chickenpox is circulating in the Solwezi settlement, we have not yet received UNHCR surveillance reports from the camps to confirm an outbreak. Zambia is not included in the CDC pilot vaccination expansion program, and varicella vaccine is not a part of the vaccination regimen.

Refugees remaining in the transit center and determined to be contacts to this case will be evaluated before departing for the US. Individual states will be notified via their Epi-X Refugee Health Forum of any past and future refugee arrivals coming from Zambia to their state who may have had contact with this refugee.

Chickenpox spreads in the air through coughing or sneezing. It can also be spread by touching or breathing in the virus particles that come from chickenpox blisters. A person with chickenpox is typically contagious 1-2 days before the rash appears and until all blisters have formed scabs. For chickenpox, rash onset occurs 10-21 days after exposure. Most persons in the United States have immunity to chickenpox, either through vaccination or past exposure. CDC recommends that you verify evidence of immunity among any staff working on the resettlement of these refugees. Additional information on chickenpox is available at www.cdc.gov/chickenpox or through your local health department.

CDC, with in-country partners, will continue to monitor the situation in Zambia and will follow up with additional information, if necessary.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "H. Burke".

Heather Burke

Immigrant, Refugee, and Migrant Health Branch
Division of Global Migration and Quarantine
Phone: (404) 639.3408