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News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Health District investigating several chickenpox cases

LAS VEGAS - January 19, 2007 - The Southern Nevada Health District is currently investigating several cases of chickenpox (varicella) among school-age children.

Chickenpox (varicella) is a vaccine-preventable disease. The vaccine prevents the illness in 70 to 90 percent of those who receive it; people who have received the vaccine but develop the disease experience milder symptoms than those who have not.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently recommended a second dose of the vaccine at age four to six in addition to the previously recommended initial dose for all children between 12 months and 15 months. Children and adults who have not had chickenpox should also be immunized. Many of the infected children received the initial dose of the varicella vaccine but have not received the second. The health district offers the chickenpox vaccine and is holding an immunization and flu shot clinic between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 20 at its 625 Shadow Lane location.

Chickenpox is a very contagious viral disease that can be spread by direct contact with fluid from the broken blisters or through the air by coughing or sneezing. An exposed individual who has not had the disease has a 70 percent to 80 percent chance of contracting the disease. Although the disease is generally mild, it can cause serious complications or even death in adults or children with compromised immune systems.

“This is a perfect opportunity to remind everyone that there is a vaccine to prevent chickenpox. The Southern Nevada Health District recommends that children receive the second dose of the varicella vaccine to prevent breakthrough disease,” said Dr. Donald S. Kwalick, the health district’s chief health officer.

Symptoms usually appear within two to three weeks following exposure to an infected person. The illness produces a mild fever and an outbreak of itchy blisters on the scalp, face and torso. The blister dries and becomes scabs in four to five days. An infected individual is contagious from one to two days before the rash appears and until all of the blisters have formed scabs.

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Health district investigating chickenpox – add one

Most childhood immunizations are free, however, an administrative fee of \$16 per patient for one immunization and \$20 for two or more will be collected. Flu shots are \$30. For more information, contact the Southern Nevada Health District's immunization program, (702) 759-0850.

For more information about chickenpox, please contact the Southern Nevada Health District's Office of Epidemiology at (702) 759-1300 or visit www.southernnevadahealthdistrict.org.