

4:30

DRAFT**EXPEDITE****STATEMENT**

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Today, CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) advised that all healthy children between 12-18 months of age should be routinely vaccinated with varicella vaccine and that older children who lack reliable histories of varicella should receive the vaccine.

Varicella (chicken pox) is highly contagious and CDC estimates that nearly 4 million cases of varicella occur annually. The majority of cases occur in children less than 15 years of age. Chicken pox is generally mild; however, CDC estimates that more than 9,000 hospitalizations a year are related to chicken pox and, annually, up to 100 persons die from chicken pox, most of them young children. Among children, a common complication of varicella is secondary bacterial infection of skin lesions; a child may have 300 lesions or more on their body during an attack of varicella. Less common complications of varicella are encephalitis and viral or bacterial pneumonia.

In the United States, annual cost of caring for children of normal health who contract chicken pox was estimated as \$918 million in 1993. A cost-benefit study suggests a savings of approximately \$5 for each dollar spent on routine childhood immunization for varicella when direct (e.g., medical and

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hospital) and indirect (e.g., loss of work by parent) costs are considered.

EXPEDITE

The CDC at my direction will begin taking steps to secure the varicella vaccine for all VFC eligible children and other youngsters served by state and local health departments.