

Merlin disease code: 05290 Varicella (Chickenpox)

[Paper case report form](#)  
Merlin extended data required

## Clinical criteria for case classification

An illness with acute onset of diffuse (generalized) maculo-papulovesicular rash without other apparent cause.

## Laboratory criteria for case classification

One or more of the following:

- Isolation of varicella virus from a clinical specimen,
- **Or** detection of varicella antigen by direct fluorescent antibody (DFA),
- **Or** detection of varicella-specific nucleic acid by polymerase chain reaction (PCR),
- **Or** fourfold rise in serum anti-varicella IgG antibody between acute- and convalescent-phase serum specimens.

## Epidemiological criteria for case classification

A person who is epidemiologically linked to a confirmed or probable varicella case.

## Case classification

### Confirmed:

Either of the following:

- A clinically compatible illness in a person with laboratory criteria
- **Or** a clinically compatible illness in a person with epidemiological criteria.

### Probable:

A clinically compatible illness.

## Criteria to distinguish a new case from previous reports

Not applicable.

## Comments

Two probable cases that are epidemiologically linked would be considered confirmed, even in the absence of laboratory confirmation. In vaccinated persons who develop varicella more than 42 days after vaccination (breakthrough disease), the disease is almost always mild with fewer than 50 skin lesions and shorter duration of illness. The rash may also be atypical in appearance (maculopapular with few or no vesicles).

Laboratory confirmation of cases of varicella is available through the Bureau of Public Health Laboratories; laboratory confirmation should be obtained for fatal cases, in outbreak settings, and in other special circumstances. Genotyping at the CDC is recommended for large outbreaks. Varicella IgM testing is not always available from commercial laboratories and is not recommended.

**Varicella cases should only be reported for cases of chickenpox. Herpes-zoster infections (shingles) are not reportable.**