The number of varicella cases reported in February 2021 increased from the previous month and remained below the previous 5-year average. Due to robust vaccination programs, there is no longer discernable seasonality for varicella cases in the United States.

In February 2021, 19 varicella cases were reported in 12 counties, outlined in black in the map below. From December 2020 through February 2021 the average county rate was lowest in North Florida.

In 2021, 37 varicella cases were reported in 17 counties.

In February, the varicella rate was highest among infants <1 year old at 1.3 cases per 100,000 population, which is consistent with previous months. Infants <1 year old are too young to receive varicella vaccination, which is why vaccination of siblings, parents, grandparents, and other age groups is important in infection prevention among infants.

The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting health care seeking behavior, which may be impacting the diagnosis and reporting of varicella cases that are shown in this report. For more information on the COVID-19 pandemic in Florida, please visit FloridaHealthCOVID-19.gov.
Varicella Surveillance

In February, 1 varicella case was associated with an outbreak, while 5 cases were transmitted within households. For most varicella cases, exposure to other known cases is not identified. In Florida, transmission setting is not routinely identified for non-outbreak cases, resulting in 50% of cases reporting unknown setting in February.

People with shingles infection can transmit the virus that causes varicella to people without immunity. In February, 3 cases reported having contact with someone diagnosed with shingles during their exposure period.

In February 2021, 63% of individuals reported with varicella had not received the recommended number of varicella vaccinations for their age or had unknown vaccination status. Vaccination against varicella is important for infants, children, teenagers, and adults. If a person was born before July 1, 1994, the current varicella immunization recommendation would not have been implemented when they were receiving their childhood immunizations. Based on the case’s age, 14 cases in 2021 would not have been vaccinated under the current childhood immunization recommendations.

In 2021, the majority of adults aged 19 years and older with varicella were not up-to-date on their varicella vaccinations or had unknown vaccination status. Although individuals who have been vaccinated can still develop varicella, complete and timely vaccination remains the best way to prevent varicella and severe complications.

Varicella surveillance goals

- Identify and control outbreaks, monitor trends, and identify severe outcomes
- Identify transmission settings in non-outbreak cases to prevent the spread of sporadic cases
- Monitor effectiveness of immunization programs and vaccines

To learn more about varicella, please visit FloridaHealth.gov/Varicella. For more information on the data sources used in Florida for varicella surveillance, see the last page of this report.