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Media alert from the Media Scanning & Verification Cell, IDSP-NCDC.

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Title:	Change in season spurs rise in chickenpox cases in Pune, Maharashtra			
Action By CSU, IDSP -NCDC	Information communicated to DSU-Pune, SSU-Maharashtra			

The rise in chickenpox cases during the ongoing exam season is keeping the children and their parents on tenterhooks. "There is perceptible rise in chickenpox cases mainly in the age group of five years to 14 years. Cases usually rise at the outset of summer season as the seasonal transition to summer provides conducive atmosphere for the varicella viruses to spread," paediatrician Sanjay Mankar, who is treating around six to seven children down with chickenpox every day, said.

Arushi (name changed), a 13-year-old resident of Kothrud, had developed chickenpox a week ago. Despite doctor's advise of administering vaccine to her three-year-old sibling, the parents didn't pay heed. Resultantly, the younger sibling also developed chickenpox. "If a child is down with the infection, parents should opt for vaccination of the other children as the disease is highly contagious," Mankar, who is also the president of the city chapter of Indian Academy of Paediatrics, told TOI. He advised parents not to send their chickenpox-affected children to schools till they recover to prevent the spread of the disease.

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**Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP), National Centre for Disease Control,
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Medical experts said the expensive vaccine against the infection was one of the reasons why a large number of children remain unvaccinated against the virus still. "A sizable chunk of children are unvaccinated because a shot against chickenpox costs around Rs 1,800, which might be beyond the reach of many people. Children are advised two shots — one at the age of 15 months and another at five years." Complications are rarely seen in chickenpox. However, Payal (4) of Wadgaon had to be admitted to a hospital two weeks ago. "Three days before being hospitalised, she had moderate to high grade intermittent fever with some skin rash," her mother said.

Apparently, the girl faced severe illness as the family physician had prescribed her 'corticosteroid', an immunosuppressive drug, which aggravated her viral illness. "There was a fear of the infection spreading to her other organs. Hence, we treated her with antiviral drug (acyclovir) for five days," Oswal said.

"Steroids should not be given to children if it is not fully indicated. Especially during this time when viral illnesses are making rounds, general practitioners should keep a high index of suspicion and carefully prescribe steroids," Oswal, who is also the deputy director of Bharati Hospital in Dhankawadi, said.

The itchy blister rash caused by chickenpox infection appears 10 to 21 days after exposure to the virus and usually lasts about five to 10 days.

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