

## Varicella

*Varicella is a Class C Disease and must be reported to the state within five business days.*

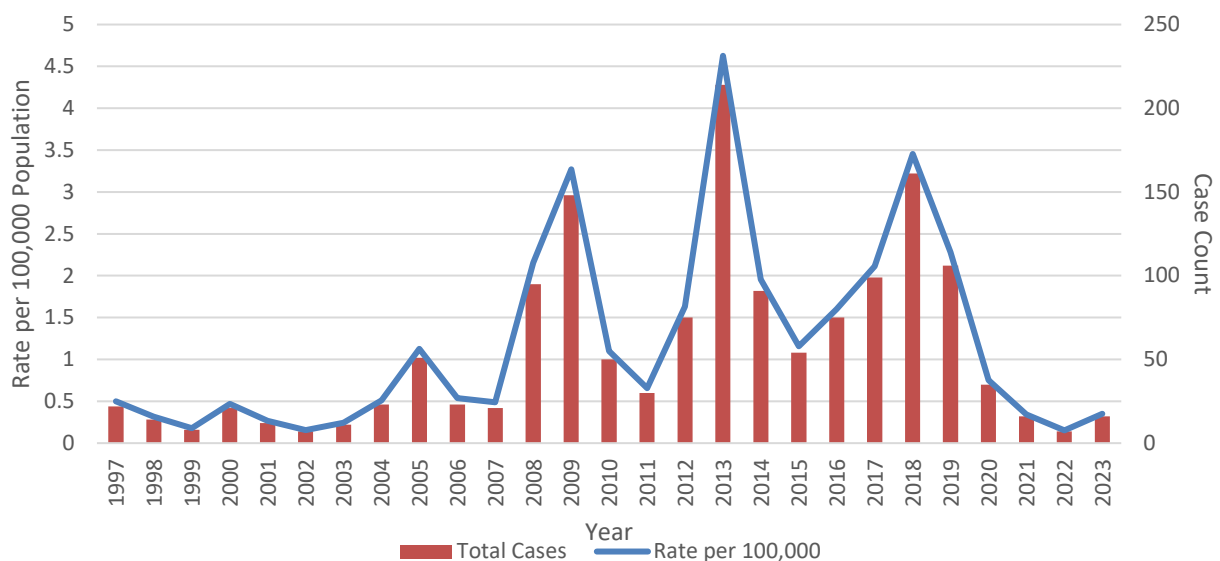
Varicella (chickenpox) is the primary infection caused by the varicella-zoster virus, characterized by a blister-like rash, itching, fatigue, and fever. Illness typically lasts five to ten days. Humans are the only source of infection, and varicella is highly contagious, with secondary infection rates in susceptible household contacts reaching up to 90%. Transmission occurs from person-to-person through direct contact with varicella or zoster lesions or via airborne spread from respiratory secretions.

The varicella vaccine has been available since 1995 and is recommended in two doses, one at 12 to 15 months of age and the other at 4 to 6 years of age. Prior to the availability of the vaccine, almost everyone developed varicella during their lifetime. Each year, approximately four million people contracted chickenpox, resulting in 10,500 to 13,000 hospitalizations and 100 to 150 deaths annually. In February 1999, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommended that varicella vaccine be required for childcare and school entry. The ACIP also strengthened recommendations for the vaccination of susceptible adults at high risk for exposure. The ACIP continues to recommend that vaccination be considered for all susceptible adolescents and adults. According to the CDC's National Immunization Survey, in 2021, 90.6% of U.S. children aged 0 to 24 months received at least one dose of the varicella vaccine, while 92.2% of adolescents aged 13 to 17 years received the recommended two doses. Due to increased vaccine coverage from 1995 to 2021, varicella cases declined by 97%. Hospitalizations and deaths also decreased significantly, with a 94% drop in hospitalizations and a 97% decline in deaths among individuals under 50, contributing to an overall 90% reduction in varicella-related hospitalizations and deaths.

### Varicella in Louisiana

Varicella became a reportable disease in 1997. The case rate in 2023 was 1.8 per 100,000. (Figure 1).

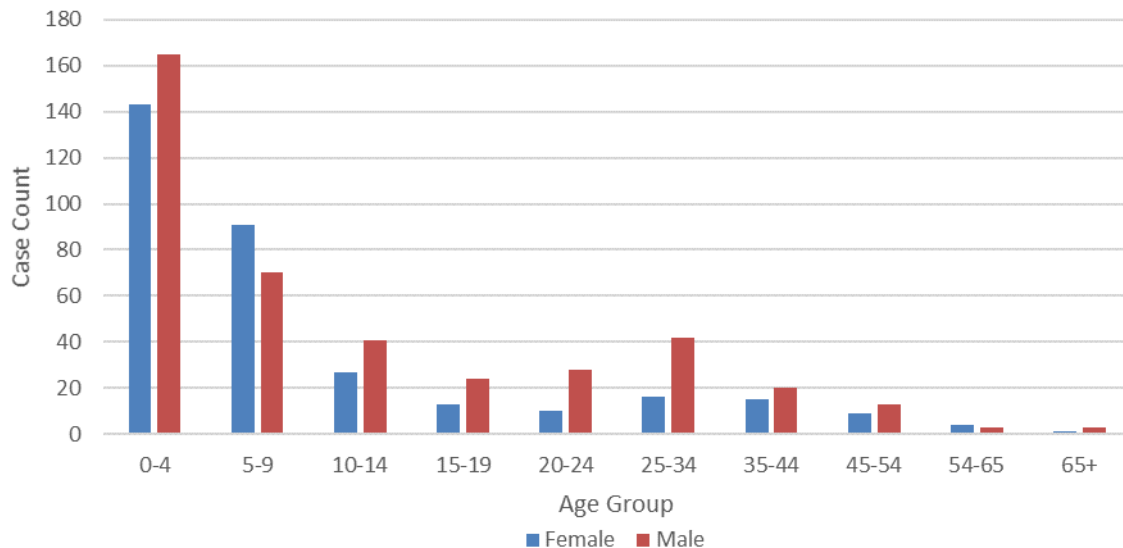
Figure 1: Varicella Cases and Incidence Rates - Louisiana, 1997-2023



## Age, Sex and Race

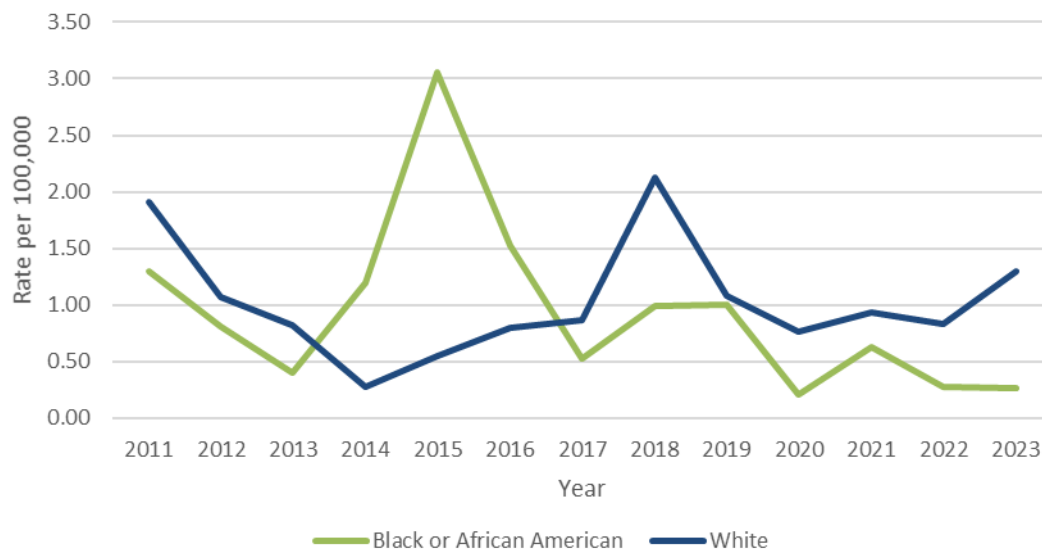
Varicella affects mainly children, with approximately 84% of cases occurring before the age of 15 years. Younger age groups continue to be the demographic with the highest rates. Most cases among older individuals are the result of gaps in immunization coverage (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Varicella Case Count by Gender and Age - Louisiana, 2013-2023



In Louisiana, White people have higher rates of varicella when completed to Black people. From 2013-2023 in Louisiana, White people made up of 39.6% of all varicella cases, compared to Black people, who accounted for 20.3% of all varicella cases (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Varicella Incidence Rates by Race - Louisiana, 2013-2023



## Seasonality

Varicella is a disease that exhibits a seasonal trend with the majority of cases occurring in the winter and spring from January to May. October 2012 and 2015 experienced a higher than average number cases, contributing to the peak demonstrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Varicella Average Monthly Case Distribution - Louisiana, 1990-2023

