

CHICKENPOX *

(VARICELLA)

What is Chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a common childhood disease caused by the *varicella zoster* virus. It is usually mild, but it can be serious in infants, pregnant women, and persons with weakened immune systems.

How is it spread?

Chickenpox is highly contagious and spread from person to person by direct contact or indirectly through articles freshly soiled by discharges from the blisters. It is also spread by droplet or airborne spread of secretions of the respiratory tract released into the air from sneezing and coughing.

What are the signs and symptoms?

The early sign is a slight fever and general fatigue followed by itchy rash (red bumps) on trunk and face that later turn into fluid-filled blisters. These usually dry and scab over in four to five (4-5) days. The blisters tend to come in crops. The most distressing symptom is the itching that accompanies the blisters. An infected individual can have just a few pox to more than 500. Some children who have been vaccinated can get a mild case of chickenpox with a small number of spots that never go to blister or crust over stage.

What is the incubation period and how long is it communicable?

The incubation period is two to three (2-3) weeks. Persons are contagious one (1) or two (2) days before the onset of the rash and until the last crop of blisters scabs over. Scabs themselves are not considered infectious.

How can chickenpox be prevented?

There is a vaccine available. Most children get their first dose at 12-15 months of age and should receive a second dose at 4-6 years of age. People 13 years of age and older (who never had chickenpox or did not receive the vaccine) should get two (2) doses at least 28 days apart. Talk to your or your child's healthcare provider about getting vaccinated.

If you have already had chickenpox, you do not need the vaccine. If you are not sure whether you have had chickenpox, your primary physician may offer a blood test.

What should I do about it?

Persons with the above symptoms should see their physicians. Immunocompromised persons, pregnant women, and premature infants who may have been exposed to someone with chickenpox should contact their healthcare provider immediately. **NEVER GIVE ASPIRIN TO A CHILD** as it may cause a rare but serious complication called Reye's syndrome.

Children can **NOT** be in school/childcare until blisters are scabbed over.

This is a **reportable disease** to the Santa Rosa County Health Department (SRCHD). The SRCHD Epidemiology Program may change exclusion rules at any time.

For more information, please contact the SRCHD's Epidemiology Program at 850-983-5200.

