

CHICKENPOX

Chickenpox (varicella) is one of the most common infections of childhood. It is highly contagious, but rarely serious for most children. Chickenpox in newborns and those with weak immune systems can be severe. Most adults/teens have had chickenpox. However, when it does occur in adults it may be more severe.

CAUSE: Varicella-zoster, a member of the *Herpesvirus* family

SYMPTOMS: Fever and skin rash that appears in crops. The rash begins on the chest, back, underarms, neck, and face. It starts out as red bumps, which turn into blisters within several hours, and then scab over after 3 to 4 days.

SPREAD: By droplets, small particles of fluid that are expelled from the nose and mouth during sneezing and coughing, or by direct contact with the blisters.

INCUBATION: It usually takes 14 to 16 days after being exposed until symptoms develop. Look for symptoms in your child for a period of 3 weeks.

CONTAGIOUS PERIOD: From 1 to 2 days before the rash develops until all the blisters have dried into scabs (a minimum of 6 days).



Exclusion

Until all the blisters have dried and formed scabs (a minimum of 5 days after the onset of the rash). Exposed children without symptoms do not need to stay home unless chickenpox develops.



Prevention Control

1. Children in child care or preschool must be vaccinated against chickenpox or have written proof confirming the year the children had the disease.
2. If your child has not had chickenpox, contact your physician or local public health immunization clinic to assess the need for vaccination.
3. When a pregnant woman or a person with a weak immune system who has not had chickenpox is exposed, he or she should contact a physician immediately for possible treatment.
4. If you suspect that your child has chickenpox, you may wish to contact a physician. Do not go to the doctor's office without calling first. They will want to keep your child separate from others to keep the chickenpox from spreading.

CAUTION

DO NOT GIVE ASPIRIN TO A CHILD WITH CHICKENPOX.

There is a risk of developing Reye syndrome (a serious condition which can cause death) when children or adolescents take aspirin for viral illnesses such as chickenpox or influenza.



For more information, you or your physician may call the Douglas County Health Department at 444-7214, or your local health department.