

Dear parents/guardians,

This letter is to notify you that some children attending _____ have contracted chickenpox. Varicella causes an acute illness with a rash that results in children missing days at school while they have a rash and parents missing work when they stay home to take care of their children. Most children now are vaccinated with at least one dose of varicella vaccine but because one dose of the vaccine is 80-85% effective for preventing chickenpox, it is not unusual to see breakthrough disease. Two doses of varicella vaccine are now routinely recommended for children.

Contagious period:

Background Chickenpox is a very contagious infection caused by a virus. It is spread from person to person by direct contact or through the air from an infected person's coughing or sneezing. It causes a blister-like rash, itching, tiredness, and fever lasting an average of 4 to 6 days. Most children recover without any problems.

Chickenpox can be spread for 1-2 days before the rash starts and until all blisters are crusted or no new lesions appear within a 24-hour period. It takes between 10-21 days after contact with an infected person for someone to develop chickenpox. Chickenpox in vaccinated persons is generally mild, with a shorter duration of illness and fewer than 50 lesions. The rash may be atypical with red bumps and few or no blisters.

What to do:

If your child or anyone in your household currently has symptoms that look like chickenpox: Contact your regular health care provider to discuss your child's symptoms and to see if anyone in the home needs to be vaccinated. Anyone who has chickenpox should avoid contact with others who have not had chickenpox or who are not vaccinated against chickenpox. **They should not attend school, day care, work, parties and/or other gatherings until the blisters become crusted (about 4-6 days after rash appears), or no new lesions appear within a 24-hours period.** Keep all chickenpox spots and blisters and other wounds clean and watch for possible signs of infection; including increasing redness, swelling, drainage and pain at the wound site. If you or anyone else in your household has a weakened immune system or is pregnant and has never had chickenpox or the vaccine, talk with your doctor immediately.

Sincerely,

Guidelines for Chicken Pox

What is Chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a very contagious rash illness caused by the varicella virus. It occurs most frequently in the winter and early spring. Once a person has had chickenpox, they generally will not get it again.

However, this virus remains dormant in a person's body and years later may reactivate as herpes zoster (shingles).

What are the symptoms?

- Sudden onset of fever
- General discomfort
- Raised, watery blisters, surrounded by a red area, which then dry, crust over and form scabs
- Rash may first appear on the upper body, then arms, legs, and face
- New blisters, open blisters, and crusts are often present at the same time

How is it spread?

Chickenpox is spread by direct person-to-person contact. The spread can occur with droplets from the nose, throat, and mouth through sneezing and coughing, and with items freshly soiled by discharges from an infected person's blisters, nose, or mouth.

An infected person can spread chickenpox from 1-2 days before the rash begins until all the lesions have dried or scabbed. Chickenpox generally develops 10- 21 days after exposure (average is 13-17 days). Ask family doctor when student can return to school.

TREATMENT:

- If you think you have chickenpox, see your health care provider for treatment recommendations. Antiviral medications are recommended for people with chicken pox who are more likely to develop serious disease including: those over 12 years of age, those with chronic skin or lung disease, people with a weakened immune system such as those receiving steroid therapy, and some groups of pregnant women.
- Rest and drink plenty of fluids. A non-aspirin product (acetaminophen, ibuprofen) can be used to reduce fever and discomfort. **Aspirin should not be used in children with viral illnesses since there have been cases associated with the development of Reye Syndrome.**
- Do not rub off scabs (this may cause scarring and infection).
 - Cut fingernails short and keep them clean to reduce infection caused from scratching.

How is it prevented?

- **People infected with the disease should remain home to avoid exposing others.**
- A vaccine to protect people against chickenpox is recommended for persons 12 months and older. Children, adolescents, and adults should get 2 doses of vaccine.
- Pregnant women should not get the chickenpox vaccine since it contains a live virus; they should wait to get the vaccine until after they have given birth.
- Persons who have previously had chickenpox disease do not need to be vaccinated.
- Use a tissue to catch sneezes and coughs and throw away used tissues in a trashcan.
- Chickenpox can cause serious complications for some persons including: newborns, people with an immune deficiency, cancer, and those who take steroids. These individuals should avoid contact with persons infected with chickenpox.