



You are being provided with this fact sheet:

because you or your child may have been exposed to chickenpox if they were present on the following date(s): \_\_\_\_\_.

If you believe your child has chickenpox, contact your health care provider. Notify your childcare provider or preschool promptly if a diagnosis of chickenpox is made.

for informational purposes only.

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### **What is Chickenpox?**

Chickenpox (varicella) is a very contagious illness caused by the varicella-zoster virus (VZV), a type of herpes virus. It is often a mild illness but may be severe in infants, pregnant women, adults, and persons with weakened immune systems.

### **What are the symptoms of Chickenpox?**

Chickenpox has a characteristic itchy rash that often starts on the face, back and chest. It can then spread to the rest of the body including the inside of the mouth, ears, eyelids or genitals. The rash appears as pink or red spots and tiny fluid-filled blisters ("pox") that then dry and become scabs, usually in 3 to 5 days but may take up to a week. The rash may be the first sign of illness, and sometimes occurs with fever\*, headache, loss of appetite, runny nose, cough and general fatigue. An infected person may have anywhere from only a few poxes to more than 500 (average 300-400) pox on their body during the illness. Chickenpox can sometimes have severe complications such as bacterial skin infections and pneumonia.

### **Chickenpox in vaccinated Individuals (breakthrough Varicella).**

Some children or adults who have been vaccinated against chickenpox may still get the disease. The individuals usually have milder symptoms with fewer or no blisters (or just red spots), a mild or no fever, and are sick for a shorter period of time than people who are not vaccinated. Some vaccinated people who get chickenpox may have a disease similar to unvaccinated people.

### **How is Chickenpox spread?**

Chickenpox virus is highly contagious and is spread by direct contact with saliva or the fluid from the pox of an infected individual or by respiratory droplets released into the air from sneezing or coughing. The illness usually starts 14 to 16 days after contact with an infected person, with a range of 10 to 21 days. Infected persons are contagious from 1 to 2 days before the rash appears and are most contagious while the rash is spreading. They remain contagious until all the pox have formed scabs, which is about 5 days from when the pox appeared. An infected person should remain home until all pox are scabbed over. A person who has never had chickenpox or chickenpox vaccine has a 90% chance of becoming infected if exposed to a person who has the virus. Chickenpox can also be spread by direct contact with the blisters of a person with shingles if the person has never had chickenpox and has not received the varicella vaccine.

### **What should I do if I've been exposed to chickenpox?**

If you are already immune to chickenpox, you most likely won't become sick. Most people do not get chickenpox more than once. If you're not already immune to chickenpox, the varicella vaccine given within 3-5 days of exposure can possibly prevent chickenpox or lessen the severity of the illness. Persons at high risk for complications from chickenpox, such as immunocompromised persons, infants, and pregnant



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women, should contact their health care provider immediately. Additionally, individuals over the age of 12 may be at higher risk for complications and should contact their health care provider for guidance.

Chickenpox is typically diagnosed by symptoms and the characteristic appearance of the rash.

### **How is chickenpox treated?**

General comfort measures are all that are needed for most cases of chickenpox. Keeping fingernails short and clean can help avoid infection from scratching. Fever reducing medication, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen, may be given if the child has a fever. *Never give aspirin to a child*, as this has been associated with Reye's Syndrome. If a lesion or blister becomes red, swollen, develops pus, or a high fever occurs, consult a health care provider immediately as this may indicate a new infection. High-risk individuals such as pregnant women, immunocompromised people, and those over the age of 12 may be prescribed antiviral medications by a health care provider to reduce the likelihood of serious complications.

### **How is Chickenpox prevented?**

Vaccination is the best way to prevent chickenpox. The vaccine is highly effective at preventing chickenpox, especially severe cases of the illness and its complications. All healthy children should routinely receive their first dose of vaccine at 12-15 months of age. A second dose of vaccine is routinely recommended for all children 4-6 years of age. Children 13 years and older and adults who do not have evidence of prior immunity should receive 2 doses of vaccine. Second dose catch-up vaccination is recommended for children, adolescents, and adults who previously received 1 dose. Contact your health care provider for more information.

The vaccine occasionally causes mild side effects, including fever and a mild rash that can occur 5 to 26 days after immunization. You don't need the vaccine if you have already had chickenpox illness. If you are not sure whether you have had chickenpox, talk to your health care provider about getting a blood test.

To prevent the spread of chickenpox, it is also recommended to clean and sanitize surfaces and practice good handwashing. Ventilate rooms with fresh outdoor air.

### **Exclude from group setting?**

Yes. Children with chickenpox need to be excluded from childcare or school until all the blisters have formed scabs. In immunized children who have mild infection where the vesicles do not form crusts, exclude until no new red bumps have appeared for at least 24 hours. Additionally, the child should be fever-free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medication.

\* Fever is defined as a temperature above 101°F (38.3°C) by any method or above 100.4°F (38.0°C) for infants younger than 2 months old.

### **References:**



*American Academy of Pediatrics*

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[Chickenpox \(Varicella\) | CDC](#)

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- The Vaccine Handbook: A Practical Guide for Clinicians, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.

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