

CHICKENPOX (VARICELLA) FACT SHEET

What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a disease caused by a virus called Varicella-zoster.

What are the symptoms of chickenpox?

- Sudden onset of slight fever, fatigue, loss of appetite
- Rashes that start as red pimples then turn into itchy blisters; rashes begin on the trunk or face, and then spread to the hands and legs
- Sores on the inside of the mouth

Symptoms appear 2-3 weeks after exposure to the virus.

Who can get chickenpox disease?

Persons who are not immune to chickenpox can get the disease. Immunity is achieved through having the disease previously or vaccination. Some children who have been vaccinated against chickenpox can have **breakthrough chickenpox**: illness is generally mild with fewer skin lesions (usually less than 50) and lasting only a few days, with low fever or no fever at all.

What is the treatment for chickenpox?

Check with your health care provider for management of chickenpox symptoms. Anyone under 18 years of age should not take aspirin or aspirin-containing products during a viral infection. Instead, use acetaminophen for fever. Clip your child's fingernails to prevent scratching. Call your health care provider if any of these symptoms are present: vomiting, sleepiness or lethargy, severe headache, stiff neck, redness, swelling and/or pus oozing from sores.

How is chickenpox spread?

Chickenpox is highly contagious. Chickenpox is spread person-to-person by direct contact, or by airborne contact with nose and/or throat secretions of an infected person. It can also be spread by indirect contact with articles soiled by discharges from the lesions of the infected person. An infected person can spread the disease 1-2 days before and usually for 5 days after the rash appears.

How is chickenpox prevented; how is its spread prevented?

- All children should be **vaccinated** with two doses of varicella vaccine; the first dose is at age 12-15 months and the second dose is typically at 4-6 years of age.
- Exclude infected children from daycare, school, public places and exclude infected adults from work until all rash has crusted, usually 5 days after they appear.
- Contacts to a case of chickenpox should consult with their health care provider about receiving chickenpox vaccine; pregnant women exposed to chickenpox or who have symptoms of chickenpox should inform their health care provider.

For more information please contact Contra Costa Public Health at 925-313-6740 and visit our website at <http://cchealth.org/topics/chickenpox/>