



HERPES VARICELLA ZOSTER (CHICKENPOX)

What is Chickenpox?

- Chickenpox is an acute contagious viral disease, caused by the herpes varicella zoster virus. Once a person has the disease, they usually have lifetime immunity.

What are symptoms that could occur?

- Symptoms can range from very mild to severe.
- It usually begins with a slight fever, general flu or cold-like symptoms, followed by crops of a red pimple-like rash.
- Within a few hours, the rash changes to water-filled blisters, then pus-filled blisters, which form a scab 3-4 days later.
- The rash spreads over the body and can appear on mucous membranes, such as the mouth, throat and eye.
- The rash can have several stages (rash, blister, scab) present at the same time and is very itchy.

How is it spread?

- By breathing the virus from moisture droplets from sneezing or coughing
- By coming into direct contact with the fluid in the blisters on objects soiled by the person with chickenpox
- Signs usually appear 2-3 weeks after exposure, averaging 14-16 days
- Most contagious 1-2 days before rash erupts continuing until all lesions are crusted

How is it diagnosed and treated?

- Primary care provider (PCP) evaluation
- The PCP may recommend lotions, bath preparations or medications to relieve itching
- Keeping the nails short can prevent scratching and infecting the rash
- Use acetaminophen or ibuprofen for fever and discomfort as needed

How can chickenpox be prevented?

- Varicella vaccine is effective in preventing disease or reducing severity of disease
- All children attending day care and school are required to have 1 dose of varicella vaccine or documented history of the disease
- Persons more than 13 years old require 2 doses of vaccine 4-8 weeks apart

Are there complications?

- Most people recover without any problems.
- In persons with immunity disorders, the liver, brain and kidney can be damaged, or death can occur.
- Severe complications can occur.
- Bacterial infections can occur from scratching the rash.

Should the sick child be isolated?

- Until lesions have crusted over, not more than 10 days

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When can the child return to day care or school?

- When the person feels well and all lesions are dry and crusted, not more than 10 days.

Should schools do special cleaning?

- Special cleaning is not necessary. Routine cleaning with EPA approved products is recommended.

If I have any other questions, whom can I contact?

- Call the Genesee County Health Department at 257-3612

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information, call your health care provider.

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