

## 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 Herpes virus 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.

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

**INCUBATION:** It usually takes 2 to 3 weeks, commonly 14 to 16 days, after being exposed until symptoms develop.

**CONTAGIOUS PERIOD:** From 1 to 2 days before the rash develops until all the blisters have dried into scabs (usually about 5 days).



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 the chickenpox, contact their physician or the Central District Health Department at 385-5175 for information about vaccination.
3. When a pregnant women 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 their 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.



**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 Central District Health Department at 385-5175, or call your local health department.