

IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

CHICKENPOX (VARICELLA)

Chickenpox is a highly contagious disease caused by the varicella-zoster virus, a member of the herpes virus family. In temperate climates, chickenpox occurs most frequently in winter and early spring. Chickenpox is very common; however, cases of chickenpox will probably decrease as more people are immunized.

Symptoms

Usually, symptoms begin 14 to 16 days and up to 21 days after being around someone with chickenpox or herpes zoster (shingles).

- The main symptom of chickenpox is an itchy, blister-like rash, usually on the face, scalp, and trunk. The blisters eventually dry, crust over, and form scabs.
- Fever and tiredness may occur along with the rash or a couple days before the rash starts.
- An infected person may have anywhere from only a few blisters to more than 500.
- The disease is usually more serious in adults than in children.

Transmission

- Chickenpox virus is highly contagious and is spread by direct contact with saliva or mucus from an infected person, or through the air when a sick person coughs or sneezes.
- A person is contagious starting 1-2 days before the spots appear until all the blisters are crusted over (usually takes about 5 days).
- Approximately 90% of persons in a household who have not had chickenpox will get it if exposed to an infected family member.
- People with weak immune systems who get chickenpox may take longer to get rid of it. Chickenpox in a pregnant woman can cause serious risks for the unborn baby.
- After a person has chickenpox, the virus can sleep in the nerve roots. Shingles (Herpes Zoster) is when it comes out in the body again years later and causes a blister-like rash in a strip-like pattern on one side of the body. Susceptible people can get chickenpox from being exposed to the shingles rash. However, you cannot catch shingles. A person gets shingles from his or her own chickenpox virus, not from someone else.

Treatment

- Most people need no treatment because the disease is mild. Pregnant women or those with a weakened immune system should see a health care provider for treatment if they have been exposed.
- People who get chickenpox usually are immune to getting it ever again.
- Possible complications from chickenpox are bacterial infections of the skin, pneumonia, brain problems, and bleeding disorders. Newborns and people with immune system problems are at greater risk.
- NEVER give aspirin products to a child or adolescent. This may cause Reye syndrome.

Prevention and

- The best prevention is to get vaccinated. Children should get 2 doses of varicella vaccine. Adolescents and adults who have not had chickenpox can also get vaccinated. The chickenpox vaccine is very effective. If a vaccinated person does get chickenpox, it is usually a very mild case.
- People infected with the disease should remain home for one week after the rash began or until the lesions become dry and crusted. This will protect others who may be susceptible.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.



c/o Franklin County Public Health, 280 East Broad Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215-4562

Call: (614) 525-8888 • After Hours: (614) 525-3965 • Fax: (614) 525-8890

Email: idsr@franklincountyohio.gov • Web: www.idrsinfo.org

