



Chicken Pox

What is it?

- A very common infection in childhood caused by the varicella virus.
- Most adults have already had chicken pox and will not get it again.
- Usually a mild illness.
- Could be dangerous to newborns or to people with weakened immune systems.
- Varicella vaccine is available for free for all children in Ontario
- Varicella vaccine is recommended for persons who have not had chicken pox and live with someone who has a weakened immune system due to leukemia or other immunocompromised condition.

What are the symptoms?

- Begins with a slight fever followed by a rash.
- Small red spots turn into fluid-filled blisters (vesicles).
- Blisters break and form a crust.
- Crust falls away between the ninth and thirteenth day.
- Itching is often severe at this stage.

How quickly do symptoms develop?

- Within 2 to 3 weeks after coming in contact with the illness.

How is it spread?

- Spreads easily from person to person through the air (coughing/sneezing)
- Direct contact with fluid from the blisters or respiratory secretions

How long is it contagious?

- Individuals with chickenpox have been shown to be infectious as long as 5 days but usually 1-2 days prior to the onset of the rash and continuing until all lesions are crusted (usually about 5 days); however, studies have shown that individuals are most infectious the day before the rash breaks out and on day one of the rash. Contagiousness may be prolonged in persons with altered immunity.
- Current recommendations from the Canadian Paediatric Society state that a child with a mild illness should be allowed to return to school or childcare as soon as he/she is well enough to participate normally in all activities (regardless of the state of the rash) as excluding children from school or childcare settings after the onset of the rash is not effective in preventing the spread of chickenpox. (Mild chickenpox is defined as having a low fever for a short period of time and only a little rash (less than 30 spots). Children with chickenpox who have a fever and/or the ongoing development of many new rash spots are not well and should not be at school or at daycare).
- Individuals with chickenpox should avoid contact with pregnant women, newborns, and persons with weakened immune systems (e.g. cancer, HIV).

How is it treated?

- Treatment is not recommended for healthy children.
- Do not give Aspirin to children as this increases the risk for Reye's Syndrome
- Antiviral drugs should be considered in the immunocompromised person.

What can you do?

- Dress in light, loose clothing. Being overheated will increase itchiness.
- Add ½ cup of baking soda to bath water helps to dry the rash.
- Keep fingernails short to prevent scarring from scratching.
- For information regarding medications to control itching, consult your pharmacy.

This information should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your physician. There may be variations in treatment that your physician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstance.

Whom should I talk to if I have any questions?

Communicable Disease Control, Algoma Public Health at (705) 942-4646, www.algomapublichealth.com, or your health care provider.

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