

### **What is chickenpox?**

Chickenpox is a highly contagious disease caused by the varicella zoster virus (VZV). The virus can cause an itchy blister-like rash. Chickenpox is common during childhood but can occur during adulthood. It is typically mild and not life-threatening to healthy children but can be serious in high-risk groups such as babies, adolescents, adults, pregnant women and persons with compromised immune systems.

### **What are the symptoms?**

Symptoms of chickenpox include an itchy rash that starts as small red spots on the face, chest, stomach, and back, that then spreads to the rest of the body including inside the mouth, ears, scalp, eyelids, or genital area. The rash may start as a few spots, clusters of spots, or hundreds of spots during the first three to five days. Other symptoms include red spots that turn into fluid-filled blisters that ultimately scab over. Other symptoms may include fever, tiredness, loss of appetite and headache. Chickenpox usually lasts about 4 to 7 days.

### **How long does this disease last?**

It takes about 14 to 16 days (range of 10 to 21 days) after exposure to a person with chickenpox for someone to develop chickenpox. A person with chickenpox is considered contagious beginning 1 to 2 days before onset of rash until all of the chickenpox lesions have scabbed over and no new lesions are forming.

### **How is chickenpox spread?**

Chickenpox spreads from person to person through the air by coughing or sneezing. It can also spread through direct contact with chickenpox lesions or from the fluid of a chickenpox lesion on clothing or bedding. Rarely chickenpox can spread when tiny droplets of fluid from chickenpox lesions get into the air and are inhaled.

- **Airborne:** Chickenpox can spread through aerosolized droplets when an infected person sneezes and coughs. These tiny aerosol droplets may remain suspended in the air and spread from person to person.
- **Direct Contact:** Chickenpox can also spread through direct contact with chickenpox skin lesions, handling fluid from lesions from clothing or bedding, or rarely, through aerosolized virus from varicella lesions.
- **Droplet:** Chickenpox can be spread through person to person contact when people come into contact with secretions from the respiratory tract of an infected person.



### **Who is at risk for chickenpox infection?**

Anyone who has not been vaccinated or never had chickenpox is at risk for developing chickenpox.

### **What preventive measures and treatments are available?**

Chickenpox can be prevented through vaccination of children 12 months of age and older, and with a booster dose of varicella vaccine at 4 to 6 years of age. CDC recommends two doses of varicella vaccine for children, adolescents, and adults or those who have not received 2 doses of vaccine or have not developed chickenpox infection. Chickenpox vaccine is safe and effective in preventing the disease. Two doses of the vaccine are 98% effective at preventing chickenpox. Most people who are vaccinated with the varicella vaccine will not get chickenpox. However, if chickenpox develops in vaccinated persons, symptoms are usually mild or there is no fever, with fewer blisters. Most cases of chickenpox are treated with bed rest, fluids, and control of fever. The use of calamine lotion and cool baths with baking soda, uncooked oatmeal, or colloidal oatmeal can relieve symptoms. Parents should not administer aspirin to ill children due to increased risk of developing Reye syndrome. Chickenpox may be treated with an antiviral drug, preferably within the first 24hrs after the rash starts. Talk to your doctor about any treatments you are considering.

### **What should schools do?**

After parents report a chickenpox infection to designated staff members of the school, schools should:

- Send a notification letter to family and staff members,
- In communications with staff, encourage all unvaccinated adults, those who have not had chickenpox, and pregnant women to consult with their healthcare provider
- Notify the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH)
- Implement appropriate environmental procedures, including:
  - Sanitizing affected classrooms,
  - Increasing ventilation,
  - Ensuring hand hygiene is instituted.

### **What are recommendations for exclusion?**

All children, teachers or caregivers who are infected with varicella virus should be excluded from school until all the blisters have been scabbed over.

For more information, visit [CDC.org/chickenpox](https://www.cdc.org/chickenpox) or Mayo Clinic: Chickenpox

