

## CAN CHICKENPOX BE PREVENTED WITH A SHOT?

- Since 1995, varicella vaccine has been given to children 12 months of age and older.
- The vaccine is 70% effective in preventing any varicella infection and 95% - 100% effective in preventing moderate or severe disease.
- People who develop chickenpox after vaccination, have much milder symptoms and fewer blisters. This leads to a faster recovery and fewer complications.
- Varicella vaccine is recommended for children, ages 12-15 months with a second booster dose between ages 4-6 years. Persons 13 years or older should receive 2 doses of the vaccine separated by at least 4 weeks to be fully protected.
- People with history of having chickenpox disease are considered immune to the disease. One percent of those receiving the vaccine have developed breakthrough or milder cases of chicken pox.

## UNVACCINATED CHILDREN EXPOSED MAY BE EXCLUDED FROM SCHOOL FOR UP TO 21 DAYS.

- A person usually has chickenpox only once in their lifetime. However, once in the body, the virus can be dormant and cause a different type of skin condition later in life called shingles or herpes zoster.



SAGINAW COUNTY DEPARTMENT  
OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
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# CHICKENPOX



THE SAGINAW COUNTY  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

## WHAT IS CHICKENPOX?

Chickenpox is an infectious disease caused by the varicella zoster virus. This virus is a member of the herpes virus family and enters the body through the respiratory tract. The varicella zoster virus spreads through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes or through contact with the fluid from the chickenpox blisters.

## HOW LONG IS IT FROM WHEN A PERSON IS EXPOSED UNTIL THEY GET THE DISEASE?

The period of time from which a person is exposed to chickenpox until they develop a rash is 14-16 days with a range of 10-21 days.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

There may be 1-2 days of fever and feeling tired and sick before the rash starts, but in children, the rash is often the first sign of the disease. The rash usually comes out in "crops" of multiple, small red bumps that look like insect bites. They quickly develop into fluid-filled blisters which break open and crust. The rash usually appears first on the trunk and upper body and then spreads to the arms and legs. Blisters can also appear in the mouth, throat, and genital area. Groups of blisters can appear for several days with all stages of the rash being present at the same time.

## HOW LONG IS CHICKENPOX CONTAGIOUS?

The contagious period for chickenpox begins about 2 days before the rash appears and lasts until all of the blisters are crusted and dried, usually about 7 days. Persons with chickenpox should be excluded from school until all the blisters are dried.

## ARE THERE COMPLICATIONS OR PERSONS WHO ARE AT HIGH RISK OF HAVING PROBLEMS BY GETTING THE DISEASE?

Complications of chickenpox include bacterial infections of the skin and viral pneumonia. Complications occur more often in persons older than 15 years of age and infants younger than 1 year of age. Others at risk of complications are persons with weak immune systems and pregnant women. These groups should avoid contact with someone with chickenpox and contact their healthcare provider if exposed.



## HOW IS CHICKENPOX TREATED?

Since chickenpox is caused by a virus, antibiotics would not be useful in treating the disease. Treatment of chickenpox involves ways to help reduce the itchiness and lowering the risk of complications which can include the following:

- Apply wet compress or provide cool, lukewarm bath water every 3-4 hours during the first couple of days.
- Colloidal oatmeal (e.g. Aveeno) can be purchased over the counter and added to bath water to relieve itching. Patting the body dry instead of rubbing can also provide itch relief.
- When sores are found in the mouth, avoid eating or drinking highly acidic or salty foods. Soft, cold, or bland foods may be tolerated better.
- Give medications as directed by your healthcare provider to help relieve pain and fever. Never use aspirin to reduce pain or fever in children with chickenpox as it can lead to Reye's syndrome, a serious disease which can cause liver failure and death.
- Clean and trim fingernails and encourage the person not to scratch their skin.