

# Fact Sheet: Chickenpox

## What is Chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a common childhood viral illness usually affecting children under 15 years old, but it **can infect** individuals of any age.

## Signs and Symptoms

Chickenpox symptoms usually start between 13 and 17 days after exposure and include:

- Slight fever
- Tiredness/weakness
- Itchy blister-like rash across body and face
- Headaches
- Chills
- Loss of appetite
- Fussiness

## Treatment

- Itching can be relieved using Calamine lotion, oatmeal baths, or Benadryl (antihistamine).
- Keep fingernails short to prevent opening of blisters when scratching.
- Headaches and fever can be treated using Tylenol (children and teens **should not** take aspirin).
- Drink plenty of fluids and rest.

## The Varicella Vaccine

- The vaccine series consists of 2 doses given at least 3 months apart for children 12 years and under and at least 4 weeks apart for those 13 years and older.
- If your child has not been immunized, they will be excluded for 21 days after exposure of the last case.
- If you do choose to immunize your children they can be conditionally re-admitted after their first vaccine dose pending the scheduling of an appointment for a second dose.

## How is it spread?

Chickenpox outbreaks normally occur during the winter and early spring. This virus is **highly contagious** and spread in the following ways:

- Direct contact with infected person (fluid from broken blisters is contagious).
- Through the air when an infected person sneezes or coughs.
- By touching soiled items from an infected person that have fluids from their blisters, nose, or mouth.

Infected individuals are contagious 1 to 2 days prior to rash forming and remain contagious for 5 subsequent days. They are no longer contagious if the sores have crusted over and no new ones are present.

## Prevention

The most effective way to prevent severe chickenpox cases is to get vaccinated against the virus at a young age (at 12 months or older). Once an individual has experienced chickenpox, they usually do not contract the virus again.

If you or your child has chickenpox, remain in your home for at least 5 days after the development of the rash or until the blisters have crusted over.

## Pregnancy Notice

- Children and other at-risk individuals living in a home with a pregnant woman should be vaccinated.
- Chickenpox may cause a birth defect called “congenital varicella syndrome” if the mother is infected during her pregnancy.

**NOTICE:** The Ingham County Health Department does not diagnose this illness.

This fact sheet is for informational purposes and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care professional. For more information about communicable disease, speak to your health care provider or call the Ingham County Health Department at (517)-887-4308.

Visit our website at <http://hd.ingham.org/Home>  
or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)  
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