

CHICKENPOX*

(varicella - zoster)

Facts and Guidelines for School Exclusion Policy

Incubation Period: 2-3 weeks, usually 13-17 days.

Signs and Symptoms: Skin rash often consisting of small blisters all over the body which leave scabs. Eruption comes in crops. There may be pimples, blisters and scabs all present at the same time. Mild fever. Sometimes this infection is mild and only a few blisters are present.

Methods of Transmission

Chickenpox is spread by direct contact, droplet or airborne spread of secretions from the respiratory tract of an infected person. Also, indirectly by contact with articles freshly soiled with the discharges from blisters or vesicles of an infected person.

Minimum Control Measures

Communicable Period: As long as 5 days but normally 1-2 days before blisters appear, and until all blisters are crusted and scabbed, or until 5 days after the appearance of the blisters. Contagiousness can be longer in a person with altered immunity.

Control: EXCLUDE infected children from school and childcare until all of the blisters are crusted and scabbed or until 5 days after the day the blisters first appear. **EXCLUDE** susceptible contacts (i.e. those children who have not had chickenpox disease or the vaccination) **from day 10 through day 21 following exposure to a case of chickenpox within the same kindergarten class or grade level required to be vaccinated.**

Vaccine-Preventable: Chickenpox vaccine is recommended at 12-18 months of age and **is required for kindergarten school entry.** It is recommended that children younger than thirteen years of age, without disease history, should receive one dose of vaccine. Adolescents and adults without disease history should receive two doses of vaccine four to six weeks apart.

Other Information

Notify parents if you suspect their child has been exposed to chickenpox.

Children should not be given aspirin or salicylate-containing compounds because the administration of these products increases the risks of subsequent Reye syndrome. Acetaminophen may be used for fever control. Early signs and symptoms include a skin rash, vomiting and confusion. Medical care should be sought immediately if Reye syndrome is suspected.

Chickenpox is generally a more severe disease in adults. Also, children with certain chronic diseases, such as leukemia or Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), are at extremely high risk for complications. Pregnant women who have not had chickenpox are not immune and should avoid exposure because illness could harm the fetus. A susceptible pregnant woman who has had exposure should consult with her physician immediately.

Shingles or zoster infections are not caused from exposure to chickenpox, but caused by reactivation of the virus in the body. Therefore, adults are not at risk for shingles when exposed to a person with chickenpox.

Chickenpox is reportable. The patient's demographics, vaccination status, and clinical information should be reported to the local and state health department. To report a case of chickenpox or if you have questions regarding the above information, contact your local health department or the Utah Department of Health at 1-888-EPI-UTAH (374-8824 Reporting Number) or (801) 538-6191.

Utah Department of Health
Office of Epidemiology
P.O. Box 142101
Salt Lake City, UT 84114-2104
Reporting Number 1-888-EPI-UTAH
Office Phone (801)538-6191
Fax (801)538-9923
<http://health.utah.gov/epi>