



Whatcom County Health Department

FACT SHEET: CHICKENPOX (VARICELLA)

What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a viral illness.

What are the signs or symptoms?

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Skin rash

What are the incubation and contagious periods?

- The incubation period is from two to three weeks (up to 21 days).
- The communicable period is from 1-2 days **before** the rash appears until the blisters are dry and crusted, usually 5-6 days after start of the rash.

How is it spread?

- It is spread by direct contact with the skin, by droplets or airborne spread of secretions from the nose and throat.

How do you control it?

- Vaccinate susceptible children
- Exclude students from school until all blisters have crusted over and are dry
- Clean or dispose of articles soiled with nose and throat discharges
- Don't share items that may be contaminated with saliva such as beverage containers
- Cover the mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, cough into your arms or sleeve if no tissue is available

What medications are used to treat the symptoms?

- Contact your usual health care provider if your child is sick enough to need medication.
- Children with chickenpox should not receive aspirin because of its possible association with Reye's Syndrome.

What are the complications?

- Infections early in pregnancy may be associated with harm to the baby.
- Newborns who develop chickenpox may develop severe illness.
- Children may develop bacterial infections after chickenpox.

Where can my child get the vaccine?

- Call your usual health care provider.
- Many physician offices have varicella vaccine.

What if my child already had chickenpox or already had varicella vaccine?

- Children under age 13 do not need a second dose of vaccine.
- Children who already had chickenpox do not need the vaccine.

