



THE FACTS:

Chickenpox (Varicella)

What is It?

Chickenpox is a very common childhood infection caused by the varicella-zoster virus. Most adults have already had chickenpox and will not get it again. Incubation period is 2 – 3 weeks. Chickenpox begins with a fever, followed in a day or two by a rash that can be very itchy. The rash starts with red spots that soon turn into fluid filled blisters. As the blisters heal they turn into scabs.

Is It Serious?

Your child may be sick with a temperature or not sick at all. In children chickenpox is usually mild, however when adults get it they can be very sick. It may be **dangerous** to newborn babies, pregnant women and persons who are immune suppressed and have not had the disease before. If a woman catches chickenpox early in her pregnancy there is a very small chance of it damaging her unborn child. In these situations a doctor must always be consulted.

How Does it Spread?

The chickenpox virus spreads very easily through the air or through direct contact with the fluid in a chickenpox blister. It can be spread from two days before the rash appears until five days after the rash starts, or until the last blister has crusted over, whichever is shorter.

Things You Can Do for an Infected Child

- Notify the school/daycare.
- **Exclusion:** A child with **severe** chickenpox and a fever should be excluded from school for five days after the rash begins or until all blisters have crusted. Children with **mild** illness may return to school as soon as he/she is well enough to participate in normal activities (regardless of the state of the rash).
- Contact your doctor if you have concerns or especially if your child is very ill with a high fever lasting more than two days or if new spots continue to occur after the 7th day.
- Do not give aspirin or any products containing aspirin. If you wish to control your child's fever safe products include (Tylenol, Temptra, Panadol and others).
- Encourage good personal hygiene. Anti itch products will help soothe the itch. Keep fingernails cut short. Scratching the blisters may cause infection and scarring.
- A vaccine is now available for healthy persons over the age of one year that is effective to prevent chickenpox. Ask your doctor if vaccination is right for you or your child.

***For Further Information Contact the Infectious Disease Program at 625-8318
or toll free 1-888-294-6630, ext. 8318.***

