

# CHICKENPOX

## PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

### **What is Chickenpox?**

*Chickenpox is a viral infection caused by the varicella virus, a type of herpes virus, and is highly contagious. Most cases occur in persons less than 15 years of age, although persons of any age can become infected.*

### **How is it spread?**

- Direct contact with fluid from blisters of an infected person.
- Contact with articles soiled with discharge from blisters or mucous membranes of a person with chickenpox.
- Breathing in droplets projected into the air by an infected person through coughing, sneezing, etc.
- Contagious usually 1-2 days before rash onset until all blisters are crusted (usually 5 days).

### **How is it treated?**

- People who would most likely get severe complications, such as those with immune problems, may be treated with antiviral drugs.
- A doctor may suggest lotions, special bath preparations and medications to relieve itching.
- Keeping finger nails short can help prevent infecting the rash through scratching.
- Use a non-aspirin product for fever or discomfort only as needed. Aspirin or salicylates should not be used since they increase the risk of Reye syndrome.

### **How can we prevent Chickenpox?**

- Two doses of chickenpox vaccine are recommended for children and adults with no evidence of immunity.
- Varicella vaccine may be effective in preventing or lessening the disease if administered within three days after exposure.
- Varicella Zoster Immune Globulin is effective in modifying or preventing the disease if given within 96 hours after exposure and should be considered for high risk contacts such as immune deficient persons and newborns of mothers who develop chickenpox 5 days prior or 48 hours after delivery.
- Exclude children from school or child care for at least five days after the appearance of the rash until all the lesions have formed scabs.

### **SYMPTOMS OF CHICKENPOX**

- Symptoms begin 2-3 weeks after exposure and range from mild to severe.
- Symptoms include fever and generalized discomfort followed by pimple-like itchy rash. The rash appears in successive crops over several days.
- Pimple-like rash progresses to fluid filled blisters and blisters progress to scabs.
- Rash can be present in several different stages of development.
- Rash first appears on trunk and face. Can spread over entire body including the scalp and mucous membranes causing 250-500 itchy blisters.

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