
Chickenpox/Shingles

Description: This viral illness has sudden onset and begins with a small sore which becomes blister like for three or four days, then leaves a scab. Several crops of these blisters will come out over a period of days, so at any one time there will be sores in various stages of development. The rash tends to be more noticeable on the trunk than on exposed parts of the body and may appear inside the mouth, on the scalp and in the upper respiratory tract. Generally, a person gets this infection only once. Herpes zoster (shingles), caused by the same virus, is an eruption in someone previously infected. Someone infected with shingles can spread chickenpox to an exposed child who has never had chickenpox. This occurs if there is direct contact with the moist rash.

Symptoms: Fever, cough, fatigue and skin rash that progresses to blisters, then scabs.

How it is Spread: Chickenpox is highly contagious. It is spread by contact with the moist rash, droplet spread (such as occurs during coughing), and airborne spread (being in the same room as a person with chickenpox).

It may be spread indirectly from contact with items soiled with the drainage from the sores.

Incubation Period: 10-21 days, usually 14-16 days.

How Long Can a Person Pass the Infection to Others? From 1-2 days before the rash appears, through a maximum of six days after the vesicles appear. Scabs are not contagious. The presence or absence of fever has nothing to do with whether the person is contagious.

Responsibilities of Parents and Caregivers:

- Inform parents that the disease is present in the child care setting. Remind parents not to give their child aspirin.
- It is important to notify parents of children who are not immunized.
- Ask parents to notify caregiver if their child breaks out with chickenpox.
- Urge anyone with an impaired immune system or who might be pregnant to consult a physician about the need for special preventive treatment.

Control of Spread:

- Contact the local health department because this is a Class A reportable disease. (See ODH Communicable Disease Chart.)
- Exclude until the sixth day after onset or until all lesions have crusted or there are no moist sores.
- Dispose of or sanitize articles soiled with nose and throat discharges.
- Wash hands after contact with soiled articles (tissues, etc) or lesions.

Treatment: No specific treatment is available. If a medicine to lower temperature or reduce the discomfort is necessary, acetaminophen-containing medicine (such as Tylenol) is recommended. Children who develop fever after exposure to chickenpox should not be given aspirin. Aspirin appears to increase the risk of Reyes syndrome, a serious disorder characterized by sleepiness and vomiting that can lead to coma and death.

Zoster immune globin should be given to some contacts who are at very high risk of complications because of other medical problems. It is not recommended for normal healthy children.

Vaccine: Chickenpox vaccine is now available for children and is given between the ages of 12 – 18 months.

