

# 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?**

Varicella vaccine is effective in preventing or lessening the disease if administered within 3 days after exposure.

A child's physician can recommend lotion or a bath preparation to relieve itching and acetaminophen to control fever. Varicella Zoster Immune Globulin (VZIG) is effective in preventing or modifying disease if given within 96 hours after exposure. VZIG should be considered for high risk contacts such as immunodeficient persons and newborns of mothers who develop chickenpox within 5 days prior to or 48 hours after delivery.

Children infected with this disease should not receive salicylates, such as aspirin, because they increase the risk of developing Reye syndrome. Keeping finger nails short is also recommended to prevent scratching and possible infection. Serious complications can result from chickenpox disease. These include bacterial infection of skin lesions, pneumonia, meningitis and encephalitis.

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

- Chickenpox vaccine (Varivax) is recommended for children, adolescents, and adults without a reliable history of chickenpox.
- **All children <13 years of age should be administered routinely two doses of varicella-containing vaccine**, with the first dose administered at 12-15 months of age and the second dose at 4-6 years of age (i.e., before a child enters kindergarten or first grade). The second dose can be administered at an earlier age provided the interval between the first and second dose is at least 3 months.
- **A second dose catch-up varicella vaccination is recommended for children, adolescents, and adults who previously had received one dose.** Catch-up second dose can be administered at any interval longer than 3 months after the first dose.

### **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.

LIVINGSTON COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
2300 E. GRAND RIVER AVE., SUITE 102, HOWELL, MI 48843-7578

(517) 546-9850

[www.lchd.org](http://www.lchd.org)