

# Chickenpox Fact Sheet

## What is Chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a very contagious rash illness caused by a virus. It occurs mostly in the winter and early spring. Once a person has had chickenpox, they will not get it again. The virus does remain dormant in a person's body and years later may come out as shingles.

## What are the symptoms?

- Sudden onset of fever
- General discomfort
- Raised, watery blisters, surrounded by a red area, which then dry, crust over and form scabs
- Rash may first appear on the upper body, then arms, legs, and face
- New blisters, open blisters, and crusts are often present at the same time

## How is it spread?

It is spread by direct person-to-person contact. The spread can occur with droplets from the nose, throat, and mouth by sneezing and coughing, and with items soiled by fluids from an infected person's blisters, nose, or mouth. A person with chickenpox can spread from 1-2 days before the rash begins until all the spots have dried or scabbed. It generally develops 10-21 days after exposure (average is 13-17 days).

## How is it treated?

- See your healthcare provider for treatment if you may have it. Medications are recommended for people with chickenpox for at risk people such as: those over 12 years of age, those with chronic skin or lung disease, people receiving steroid therapy, and some pregnant women.
- Rest and drink plenty of fluids. Products like Tylenol or Advil can be used to reduce fever and discomfort. **Aspirin should not be used in children with a virus since there have been cases associated with the development of Reye Syndrome.**
- Do not rub off scabs (may cause scarring and infection).
- Cut fingernails short and keep them clean to reduce infection caused from scratching.

## How is it prevented?

- People infected with the disease should remain home to avoid others.
- A vaccine to protect people against chickenpox is suggested for kids 12 months and older. Children, adolescents, and adults should get 2 doses of vaccine.
- Pregnant women should not get the vaccine since it contains a live virus; they should wait to get the vaccine until after they have given birth.
- Persons who have had chickenpox disease do not need to be vaccinated.
- Use a tissue to catch sneezes and coughs and throw away used tissue in a trash can.
- Chickenpox can be serious for some including: newborns, people with an immune deficiency, cancer, and those who take steroids. These individuals should avoid contact with people who have chickenpox.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information, call your health care provider or call the Bay County Health Dept at (989) 895-4003.

Visit our website at <http://www.baycounty-mi.gov/Health/> or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)