



CALHOUN COUNTY

Public Health Department

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Battle Creek, MI 49014

calhouncountymi.gov/publichealth
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Fact Sheet

Chickenpox

What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a very contagious rash illness caused by the varicella-zoster virus. 90% of individuals that are not immune will become infected if they encounter an infected person. It occurs most frequently in the winter and early spring. Once a person gets chickenpox, they will generally not get it again.

Who gets chickenpox?

Chickenpox is very common in the United States. Almost everyone who is not vaccinated acquires chickenpox by adulthood. It is most common in children under 15 years old.

What are the symptoms of chickenpox?

Initial symptoms include the sudden onset of a slight fever and feeling tired and weak. These are soon followed by an itchy, blister-like rash. The blisters eventually dry, crust over, and form scabs. The rash may first appear on the upper body, then arms, legs, and face.

How is chickenpox spread?

Chickenpox spreads from person to person by direct contact or by the airborne spread of droplets from the nose, throat, or mouth through sneezing or coughing. It can also spread by contact with items freshly soiled by discharges from an infected person's blisters, nose, or mouth.

A person with chickenpox is contagious 1-2 days before the rash begins and until all blisters have formed scabs. People are considered contagious until no new lesions have appeared for 24 hours. The illness usually lasts 5 to 10 days.

It takes 10 to 21 days after exposure to chickenpox for someone to develop the illness.

In the past, some parents participated in “chickenpox parties” to intentionally expose their children to a child with chickenpox so they would get the disease and gain future immunity. It is highly recommended to **not** host or participate in these events.

What is the treatment for chickenpox?

If you think you have chickenpox, see your health care provider for treatment recommendations. There is an antiviral drug that could help with the treatment, but most doctors do not prescribe it for healthy people. Other treatments include rest and plenty of fluids.

Do not use aspirin in children with chickenpox as it has been associated with Reye’s syndrome. Tylenol/acetaminophen can be used to reduce fever and discomfort.

Do not rub off scabs as it could cause scarring and infection. Cut fingernails short and keep them clean to reduce infection from scratching. Calamine lotion and cool colloidal oatmeal baths may help relieve some of the itching.

Are there complications from chickenpox?

- Bacterial infections of the skin and soft tissues in children
- Infection of the lungs (pneumonia)
- Infection or swelling of the brain
- Bleeding problems
- Bloodstream infections (sepsis)
- Dehydration
- Reye’s Syndrome

Deaths are very rare not due to the vaccine, but some deaths from chickenpox have continued in healthy, unvaccinated children and adults.

How can chickenpox be prevented?

People infected with chickenpox should be kept at home to limit the risk of transmitting the virus to others.

The chickenpox vaccine is a two-dose regimen is recommended for children, adolescents, and adults that have never had chickenpox and were never

vaccinated. Most people who get the chickenpox vaccine will not get chickenpox. However, if someone who has been vaccinated *does* get chickenpox, it is usually very mild. They will have fewer spots, are less likely to have a fever, and will recover faster.

How do I get more information on chickenpox?

Calhoun County Public Health Department

Phone: 269-969-6383

 www.facebook.com/CCPublicHealthDepartment/

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Phone: 800-232-4636 (800-CDC-INFO)

Website: www.cdc.gov/chickenpox/

Spanish: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents/diseases/varicella-sp.html>

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