

FACT SHEET
CHICKENPOX
 (Varicella zoster)

<i>What is chickenpox?</i>	Chickenpox is a common childhood rash illness caused by a virus. It is usually mild, however, before the vaccine was available, it was responsible for over 11,000 hospitalizations and 100 deaths annually in the U.S.A.
<i>How is it spread?</i>	Chicken pox is spread by air droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes, or through contact with the fluid from the rash. Scabs are not infectious.
<i>What is the incubation period?</i>	10-21 days after exposure; average time is 14-16 days.
<i>What are the early signs?</i>	It starts as a rash on the upper body and spreads to the face, arms and legs. The rash develops into itchy, fluid-filled blisters that break open and scab over within a few days. Children may have a mild fever for 1-2 days before the rash appears; chills, fussiness, loss of appetite and headaches.
<i>What about contacts?</i>	Children should only be excluded from school if symptoms of illness appear.
<i>How long is the person contagious?</i>	Chickenpox is contagious for a few days before and for up to 6 days after the rash first appears.
<i>When is it OK to return to school?</i>	Children should stay home until all the blisters are dried up and crusted over. Also, the child should feel well enough to participate in activities.
<i>What else should I know?</i>	<p>Parents should discourage children from scratching sores to prevent secondary infections. Keep fingernails short. Calamine or Caladryl lotion, Benedryl cream, or baking soda or oatmeal baths may relieve itching.</p> <p>Teach children to practice good handwashing, cover their nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, and dispose of used tissue in the wastebasket.</p> <p>There is a vaccine available to help prevent chickenpox. Please refer the vaccine information section of this guidebook for more information.</p>

This fact sheet is not intended to replace the advice of your physician. Parents should contact their healthcare provider if they have concerns regarding their child's health. If you have general questions, you may contact a Kalamazoo County nurse at 373-5264 or 373-5267.

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