



VARICELLA (CHICKENPOX) FACT SHEET

WHAT IS CHICKENPOX?

Chickenpox is a very contagious disease caused by the varicella-zoster virus. The Varicella-zoster virus also causes shingles. For most people, getting chickenpox once provides immunity for life. Although uncommon, some people can get chickenpox more than once.

HOW DO YOU GET CHICKENPOX?

The virus spreads mainly by touching or breathing in the virus particles that come from chickenpox blisters, and possibly through tiny droplets from infected people that get into the air after they breathe or talk. A person with chickenpox can spread the disease for 1 to 2 days before they get the rash and until all lesions have crusted. Chickenpox can be spread from people with shingles to others who have never had chickenpox or have never received the chickenpox vaccine.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms appear about 2 weeks (from 10 to 21 days) after exposure. The rash may first show up on the face, chest, and back then spread to the rest of the body. The rash is typically itchy and has fluid-filled blisters that eventually turn into scabs. Chickenpox illness usually lasts about 5 to 7 days. Other symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Tiredness
- Loss of appetite
- Headache

TREATMENT

There are several things that can be done at home to help relieve the symptoms and prevent skin infections. Calamine lotion and colloidal oatmeal baths may help relieve some of the itching. Keeping fingernails trimmed short may help prevent skin infections caused by scratching blisters. Use non-aspirin medications, such as acetaminophen, to relieve fever from chickenpox. Discuss treatment options with your doctor.

PREVENTION

- The best way to prevent chickenpox is to get the chickenpox vaccine. Children, adolescents, and adults should get two doses of chickenpox vaccine.
- People infected with the disease should remain home and avoid exposing others who may be susceptible until no fever for 24 hours and all blisters have crusted over.

DGHD EFFORTS

The Delaware General Health District (DGHD) offers the varicella vaccine. Please call (740) 203-2040 to schedule an appointment. Reports of suspected and confirmed cases of disease are made to the DGHD. The DGHD investigates potential sources of illness, conducts surveillance for the spread of disease, and engages in community outreach and education.