

Varicella Guidelines

WHAT IS VARICELLA?

Varicella (chickenpox, varicella-zoster virus) is a highly contagious viral infection causing an itchy, blister-like rash on the skin. Chickenpox is highly contagious to those who haven't had the disease or been vaccinated against it. After the primary infection, the virus stays in the body as a latent infection. Primary infection with varicella-zoster virus causes varicella. Reactivation of latent infection causes herpes zoster (shingles).

COMMON SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- Itchy rash
- Blisters that crust
- Mild fever
- Malaise

CONTAGIOUS TIME PERIOD:

2 days prior to onset of rash to 5 days after rash resolves or until lesions crust over.

TIME FROM EXPOSURE TO SYMPTOMS:

10-21 days; usually 14-16 days.

SPREAD BY:

Inhalation or direct contact of respiratory secretions, skin lesions, or contaminated objects.

TREATMENT / SELF-CARE:

Treatment usually involves relieving symptoms although high-risk groups may receive antiviral medications. Soothe skin with oatmeal baths and moisturizers. Over-the-counter pain medications, and antihistamines.

ACTION AT SCHOOL:

Exclude the child from school until fever-free (99.9 F or below) for 24 hours without the use of any fever reducing medications. Exclude until lesions have dried and crusted.

CONSIDERATIONS AND PREVENTION MEASURES:

Families should be notified of risk. Good handwashing and hygiene. Proper disinfection of surfaces. A vaccine is available to prevent illness.

- Reportable to State and local health departments.

