

## **CHICKENPOX\*** (varicella – zoster virus)

### **Incubation, Signs and Symptoms**

**Incubation Period:** 2-3 weeks, usually 14-16 days.

**Signs and Symptoms:** Skin rash often consisting of small blisters all over the body, which leave scabs. Eruption comes in crops. There may be pimples, blisters and scabs all present at the same time. Mild fever may be present. Sometimes this infection is mild and only a few blisters are present.

### **Methods of Transmission**

Chickenpox is spread by direct contact, droplet, or airborne spread of secretions from the respiratory tract of an infected person. Also, indirectly by contact with articles freshly soiled with the discharges from blisters or vesicles of an infected person.

### **Minimum Control Measures**

**Communicable Period:** As long as 5 days but normally 1-2 days before blisters appear, and until all blisters are crusted and scabbed, or until 5 days after the appearance of the blisters. Contagiousness can be longer in a person with altered immunity.

**Control:** EXCLUDE infected children from school and childcare until all of the blisters are crusted and scabbed. EXCLUDE susceptible contacts (i.e. those children who have not had chickenpox disease or the vaccination) from day 10 through day 21 following exposure to a case of chickenpox within the same kindergarten class or grade level for which chickenpox is required for attendance.

**Vaccine-Preventable:** Chickenpox vaccine is recommended at 12-18 months of age and is required by law for kindergarten and for 7th grade entry. It is recommended that children younger than thirteen years of age, without disease history, should receive one dose of vaccine. Adolescents thirteen years of age and older and adults without disease history should receive two doses of vaccine at least four weeks apart.

**Other Information:** Notify parents if you suspect their child has been exposed to chickenpox. **Children should not be given aspirin or salicylate-containing compounds because the administration of these products increases the risks of Reye syndrome.** Acetaminophen may be used for fever control. Early signs and symptoms include a skin rash, vomiting, and confusion. Medical care should be sought immediately if Reye syndrome is suspected. Chickenpox is generally a more severe disease in adults. Also, children with certain chronic diseases, such as leukemia or Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), are at extremely high risk for complications. Pregnant women who have not had chickenpox are not immune and should avoid exposure because illness could harm the fetus. A susceptible pregnant woman who has had exposure should consult with her physician immediately. Shingles or zoster infections are not caused from exposure to chickenpox, but caused by reactivation of the virus in the body. Therefore, adults are not at risk for shingles when exposed to a person with chickenpox. \*Chickenpox is reportable. The student's name, demographics, and vaccination status should be reported to the district nurse or local health department.