

## **Information Letter – Chickenpox (Varicella)**

Your child may have been recently exposed to the Chickenpox (Varicella) virus.

### **Causes:**

Chickenpox is a viral disease characterized by itching and a skin rash with fluid-filled blisters that break and form crusts. The onset of the rash may be preceded by a day of mild fever and malaise. The rash begins with a few small reddish bumps that quickly fill with fluid to form small blisters. The blisters appear in “crops” (small grouping), first on the trunk then spreading to the extremities, face and scalp over a period of 2-4 days. The rash may spread into the mouth and other internal parts of the body. The blisters break and a light brown scab or crust forms over the top. The crust gradually darkens to a dark brown before it finally falls off, usually within 2 weeks of the onset of the illness.

Chickenpox is spread from person to person by respiratory droplets or by contact with articles freshly soiled by discharge from the lesions. It is contagious for two (2) days before the onset of the rash, until six (6) days after the appearance of the first lesion, or until all of the lesions are crusted over.

### **Prevention:**

Varicella Zoster Immune Globulin (VZIG) may modify the severity of the disease or prevent the disease, if given within 96 hours after exposure to the virus. In general, this is reserved for high-risked individuals (such as a depressed immune system).

### **Symptoms:**

- Achy and feverish one (1) day prior to rash
- A skin rash or lesion on the chest, back, shoulders, scalp, or other areas
- Lesions on the mouth, vagina, rectum or eyes
- The rash changes over several hours to fluid-filled blisters
- Crusting, after the blister breaks, occurs 2-4 days
- Crusts become progressively darker with time
- Scabs fall off in 9-13 days
- Itching may be severe

### **Treatment:**

General measures to relieve itching: cool water soaks or compresses, and bathing with one (1) cup of baking soda added to lukewarm bath water. Topical preparations to relieve itching may be helpful. Fingernails should be trimmed to prevent scratching, which may lead to secondary infections.

**DO NOT USE ASPIRIN to reduce fever!** Aspirin use during a viral illness, particularly chickenpox, has been associated with a risk of developing Reye’s Syndrome.

The prescription drug Acyclovir has been approved by the FDA for use in treating the symptoms of chickenpox in people over two (2) years old.

Children should be kept home from school until all the blisters have broken and scabbed over.

### **Prognosis:**

The outcome is expected to be excellent in an uncomplicated case.

### **Complications:**

Women who acquire chickenpox early in pregnancy are at risk for congenital malformations in the fetus (rare). Newborns are at risk for severe infections, if their mothers are not immune.

**Call your Healthcare Provider immediately if your child currently has or has recovered from chickenpox in the last two (2) weeks and begins vomiting or becomes restless, agitated or combative. Call if the lesions contain pus or appear infected, or if headache, lethargy, or sensitivity to light develops or if fever persists.**

### **Source:**

CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/chickenpox/index.html>

CA Department of Health: <https://archive.cdph.ca.gov/HEALTHINFO/DISCOND/Pages/Varicella.aspx>