



# Chickenpox Fact Sheet

## What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a contagious disease caused by the varicella-zoster virus (VZV).

## How can it be recognized?

The 4 stages of the rash are: 1) a red papule (bump); 2) a vesicle (clear blister) appears on the top of the papule; 3) the vesicle becomes a pustule (its content becomes gray); 4) the pustule dries into a crust.

There may be only a few of the spots, or there may be hundreds. They appear in crops, over a period of up to 4 days. Several stages may be present at the same time (the child may have papules, blisters, pustules, and scabs at the same time.) They may leave permanent scars, especially if the blisters get infected by bacteria. Fever can be anywhere from none to very high and may appear a few days before the rash.

## How long does it take from exposure to development of the disease?

The average incubation period for chickenpox is 14 to 16 days after exposure. Fever and general illness may occur 1 to 2 days before rash begins, particularly in adults. In children, the rash is often the first sign of disease.

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## When is it contagious?

From five days before the rash appears until six (6) days after the appearance of the first crop of blisters or until the spots are all dried and crusted, whichever is longer.

## How is it spread?

By droplets from the nose, mouth or throat, usually expelled by a cough or sneeze. It can also be spread by direct contact, such as eating, drinking, or sharing personal items or from the fluid from the blisters of an infected child (respiratory and direct contact spread). The scabs are NOT contagious.

## What should be done?

- Isolate the child from other children.
- Notify the parents to pick up the child.
- Wash articles soiled by discharges from nose, throat and blisters.

## Who should be notified?

- Notify other parents after the case is confirmed.
- Watch closely for early symptoms in others for up to 3 weeks.

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### **When can the child be readmitted to the center?**

Six days after the appearance of the first crop of blisters or when all blisters are scabbed over and dry.

### **What can be done to prevent the spread of chickenpox?**

Anyone coughing or sneezing should cover their nose and mouth. Do not allow eating or drinking after others. Careful handwashing may help prevent the spread. A vaccine is available to protect against chickenpox; check with your medical care provider or your local health department.

*For further information, contact the  
Oklahoma City-County Health Department  
(405) 425-4437*

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