

# VARICELLA (CHICKEN POX)

## Symptoms

- Chickenpox has a characteristic itchy rash, the “pox”, which then forms blisters that dry and become scabs in 4 to 5 days.
- The rash may be the first sign of illness, sometimes coupled with fever and general fatigue.
- An infected person may have anywhere from only a few pox to more than 500 pox on their body during an attack (average 300 to 400).

## Transmission

- Chickenpox virus is highly contagious and is spread by direct contact with secretions (such as saliva) from an infected individual or through the air from respiratory secretions (i.e. sneezing, coughing).
- It can be spread 1 to 2 days before the rash appears, and until all blisters have formed scabs, usually within 5 days from the time the blisters appear.
- People with weak immune systems who get chickenpox may take a longer time for their pox to scab over.
- Chickenpox develops within 10 to 21 days after contact with an infected person (the incubation period)
- Approximately 90% of persons in a household who have not had chickenpox will get it if exposed to an infected family member.

## Prevention and Treatment

- CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the American Academy of Family Physicians recommend that all children be routinely vaccinated at 12 to 18 months of age and that all children receive the vaccine before their 13th birthday if they have not had chickenpox (ACIP, AAP).
- Varicella vaccine has been available since March 1995. It can safely be given to most children 12 months of age or older, adolescents and adults who have not had chickenpox.
- Varicella vaccine is highly effective in protecting against chickenpox and its related complications, such as pneumonia and skin infections.

