

## FACT SHEET

### Chickenpox (Varicella)

Chickenpox is an acute infectious disease in the herpesvirus group that results in a blister-like rash, itching, tiredness and fever. Primary infection is called Chickenpox while secondary infection is called Shingles or Herpes Zoster.

**Cause:** Varicella zoster virus (VZV)

**Symptoms:** Primary infection (Chickenpox): A skin rash (red spots and bumps) of blister-like lesions, usually appears first on the trunk, face, and scalp and can spread over the entire body including inside the mouth, respiratory tract, ears, and genital areas. After blistering, the rash forms a crust. Varying stages of red spots/bumps, blisters and scabs can be present at the same time. Most cases of chickenpox occur in persons less than 15 years old. Before the varicella vaccine was used, the disease had annual cycles, peaking in the spring of each year.

Secondary infection (Shingles): Varicella zoster virus once inside the body travels to the sensory nerve roots and remains dormant until a reactivation occurs and results in herpes zoster infection, commonly known as shingles.

**Spread:** Chickenpox is highly contagious and is thought to be spread from person to person contact by from infected respiratory droplets (coughing and sneezing), soiled tissues used by infected person, direct contact or inhalation of airborne droplets of a person who has either varicella (chickenpox) or zoster (shingles). Maintain precautions until all lesions are crusted.

**Incubation:** From 2 to 3 weeks; commonly 14-16 days after exposure to the rash.

**Contagious Period:** A persons with chickenpox is contagious 1-2 days before the rash appears and until all blisters have formed scabs.

**Prevention:** **Children:** Varicella vaccine is recommended for age 12-15 months for susceptible children (i.e., those who lack a reliable history of chickenpox). A second dose is given at age 4 to 6 years and offers a 98% coverage against the illness.  
<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/pinkbook/downloads/varicella.pdf>.

**Adult:** All adults without evidence of immunity should receive 2 doses of varicella vaccine. The second dose should be given 4-8 weeks after the first dose. May use as post-exposure prophylaxis if given within 5 days.

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/pinkbook/downloads/varicella.pdf>