

## What is Chickenpox?



Chickenpox is a contagious infection caused by the varicella virus. It causes a rash of itchy blisters on the skin, mouth and throat. Chickenpox is highly contagious, and can spread to other people, especially people who have not had a varicella (chickenpox) vaccination.

### How is chickenpox spread?

- It usually enters the body through the mouth and nose when someone who is sick with chickenpox sneezes or coughs.
- When the sick person sneezes or coughs, tiny drops of fluid that are filled with the virus are sprayed into the air.
- Other people breathe in these tiny drops of fluid and can become sick.
- A person can also catch chickenpox by touching the fluid from chickenpox blisters. The fluid in the blisters is full of the chickenpox virus.

If a person is not immune to the chickenpox virus, he or she will usually break out in a chickenpox rash within 10 to 21 days after being exposed to the virus.

- Usually the person breaks out in a rash about 2 weeks after being exposed.
- Once a person has chickenpox, he or she is usually immune for life and can't catch chickenpox again.

A person who has chickenpox can spread the disease to others from about two days before breaking out in the rash until all the itchy blisters have dried up.

For most healthy children, chickenpox makes them feel bad and itchy for a few days, then it goes away. However, chickenpox can make a person very sick or even cause a person to die.

People who have not had chickenpox or are unsure if they have had chickenpox, should try not to be around people who are sick with chickenpox. This is very important for:

- Pregnant women
- Babies
- People who have had organ transplants
- People taking a high dose of steroid medicine
- People who have cancer
- People who are HIV positive or have AIDS

### What to look for:

A day or two before breaking out in the chickenpox rash, many children:

- Feel bad
- Have a headache and/or body aches
- Have a low fever
- Do not feel like eating

Some children may not feel bad before they break out in the rash.

### About the chickenpox rash:

- The chickenpox rash usually starts as itchy, red blisters on the child's body and head.
- The rash then spreads to the arms and legs.
- The blisters break open in 1 to 2 days and make crusty scabs.
- Some children will only have a few chickenpox blisters, while others may have hundreds.
- Most children will have some blisters that are drying up while new ones are still forming.

Parent Information  
School Age Children

# What is Chickenpox? (continued)



## Call before taking your child to a health care provider!

Your healthcare provider may want you to bring your child to a special waiting room so that other children will not be exposed to the chickenpox virus.

## There is a vaccine for chickenpox.

- The vaccine for chickenpox can be given to healthy children over 12 months of age, teens, and adults who have never had chickenpox.
- A booster dose is recommended at least 3 months following the first dose.
- The vaccine protects your child from getting sick if they are around someone with chickenpox.
- Contact your child’s healthcare provider or local health department for information about the vaccine.

## Protection (immunity) following the chickenpox vaccine:

- There are cases of chickenpox in children who have been given the vaccine.
- These cases are called breakthrough cases and are almost always mild and short lasting.
- Children with mild or breakthrough chickenpox disease may not have blisters or crusting of blisters.

*Information from DPH’s Child Care and School Exclusion Lists: Exclude children with Varicella (chickenpox) until all lesions have dried and crusted (usually 6 days after onset of rash).*

*For additional information about exclusion when a child has chickenpox, see the DPH Child Care and School Exclusion Lists of Contagious or Communicable Diseases at [www.dph.sc.gov/diseases-conditions](http://www.dph.sc.gov/diseases-conditions)*

Child’s Name \_\_\_\_\_

School Nurse \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

School \_\_\_\_\_

School Phone Number ( \_\_\_\_\_ ) \_\_\_\_\_



**SOUTH CAROLINA  
DEPARTMENT OF  
PUBLIC HEALTH**