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cchealth.org

K-12 Recommendations for Chickenpox (Varicella)

Contra Costa County works closely with K-12 school partners to keep students, staff, and their families safe and healthy. Chickenpox should be reported to your local Public Health Department when outbreaks, hospitalizations or deaths occur.

Symptoms:

The classic symptom of chickenpox is a rash that turns into itchy, fluid-filled blisters that eventually turn into scabs. The rash may first show up on the face, chest, and back then spread to the rest of the body, including inside the mouth, eyelids, or genital area. It usually takes about one week for all the blisters to become scabs.

Other typical symptoms that may begin to appear 1-2 days before rash include high fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, and headache.

The virus spreads from person to person by direct contact with blister fluid or airborne spread of aerosolized blister secretions and respiratory secretions. Indirect spread is possible through articles recently soiled by infected respiratory secretions or blister fluid.

A person with chickenpox is contagious as long as 5 days before the rash begins, but usually 1 to 2, until all lesions are crusty/scabbed (usually 5 days after their appearance). Immunocompromised individuals may have a longer period of communicability.

What can you do to prevent chickenpox:

- All children should be **vaccinated** with two doses of varicella vaccine; the first dose is at age 12-15 months and the second dose is typically at 4-6 years of age.
- Clean and sanitize mouthed toys, objects, and surfaces and clean and disinfect objects and surfaces contaminated with secretions from the nose or mouth and/or blister fluid at least daily, and when soiled.
- Cover nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing or cough/sneeze into your elbow. Dispose of used tissues.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after contact with secretions from the nose or mouth or blister fluid.

What to do if you get chickenpox or are exposed to chickenpox:

- Children should be excluded from childcare and school until all the blisters have scabbed (usually 5 days after their appearance), regardless of vaccination status. Exclude a child with chickenpox symptoms until the blisters have scabbed regardless of whether or not they have received varicella vaccine.
- Susceptible persons (did not receive varicella vaccine) who have been exposed to someone with chickenpox should call their healthcare provider immediately. This is especially important for pregnant women and persons with a weakened immune system.

For more information, please contact Contra Costa Public Health at 925-313-6740 or visit our website at <https://www.cchealth.org/health-and-safety-information/communicable-disease-program>.

For CDPH school guidance please visit

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Schools/SymptomGuidance.aspx>.