



South Central Public Health District

Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Twin Falls 737-5900 * Burley 678-8221 * Gooding 934-4477 * Bellevue 788-4335 * Jerome 324-8838 * Rupert 436-7185

CHICKENPOX

What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a contagious disease caused by a virus. It occurs most commonly in winter and spring.

Who gets chickenpox?

In the United States, most children get chickenpox before they are ten years old.

What are the symptoms of chickenpox?

Initial symptoms include sudden onset of fever and feeling tired and weak. These are soon followed by an itchy, blister-like rash on the body and even on the eyelids and in the mouth. New spots continue to appear for about three or four days. The spots will dry up and scab over before falling off. The disease is usually more serious in adults than in children.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear in about two weeks.

How is chickenpox spread?

Chickenpox is spread by direct contact with the chickenpox rash before it crusts over. It is also spread through the air by discharges from an infected person's nose and throat. Another way to get chickenpox is by handling articles that are freshly soiled by the infected person's chickenpox lesions.

How long is a person able to spread chickenpox?

A person is probably most contagious for a day or two before the rash appears and for as long as five days after the rash begins. Once scabs form over all the spots, the person can no longer spread the disease.

Does past infection with chickenpox make a person immune?

Chickenpox generally results in lifelong immunity. However, this infection may remain hidden and recur years later as Herpes zoster (shingles) in some older adults and sometimes in children.

What complications are associated with chickenpox?

Reye syndrome (a rare brain condition) can follow some cases of chickenpox. Severe chickenpox can occur in newborn babies whose mothers have not had chickenpox and who are exposed to chickenpox within the five days before and two days after birth. Persons with weak immune systems or who are taking drugs that suppress their immune system are at increased risk of developing a severe form of chickenpox.

Is there a vaccine for chickenpox?

A vaccine to protect children against chickenpox has recently been approved in the U.S. Contact your doctor for more information about the vaccine. A shot of varicella zoster immune globulin (VZIG) may be given to protect high-risk newborns and persons with weak immune systems if they are exposed to chickenpox. VZIG may prevent or lessen the severity of chickenpox if given within 96 hours after exposure to a case of chickenpox.

What is the treatment for chickenpox?

In healthy children, chickenpox is usually a mild disease and treatment is directed at reducing the itch and discomfort. Children with chickenpox should not receive aspirin because of the possibility of causing a complication called Reye syndrome. A prescription medicine called acyclovir is available but is usually not indicated for healthy children. Your doctor can give you more information.

Does chickenpox pose a risk to pregnant women?

If a woman gets chickenpox when she is pregnant there could be a risk to the baby. You should consult your doctor if you are pregnant and have not had chickenpox.

How can chickenpox be prevented?

To avoid spreading the disease, people with chickenpox should remain home for five days after the beginning of the chickenpox rash or until the lesions become dry. Particular care should be taken to avoid exposing persons with weak immune systems to chickenpox.