



## FACT SHEET

### Chickenpox (Varicella)

Chickenpox is an infectious disease caused by the varicella-zoster virus. Chickenpox results in a blister-like rash, itching, tiredness and fever.

**Symptoms:** A skin rash of blister-like lesions, usually on the face, scalp, or trunk develops. The rash appears first on the trunk and face, but can spread over the entire body potentially causing 250 to 500 itchy blisters. 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.

**Spread:** Highly contagious; person to person contact by coughing and sneezing, soiled tissues/cloth used by infected person. Maintain precautions until all lesions are crusted.

**Incubation:** From 2 to 3 weeks; commonly 14-16 days.

**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 12-18 months for susceptible children (i.e., those who lack a reliable history of chickenpox). Susceptible persons age >13 years should receive 2 doses, given at least 4 weeks apart.

**Adult:** Varicella vaccination recommendations include close contacts of persons at high risk for serious complications, persons who live or work in environments where transmission of varicella is likely (e.g. teachers of young children, day care employees, residents and staff in institutional settings), or where transmission can occur-college dorms, inmates and staff members of correctional institutions and military personnel), nonpregnant women of childbearing age, adolescents and adults in households with children and international travelers.