

Chickenpox Information for School Health Personnel:

Introduction

Chickenpox is a contagious disease caused by the highly contagious varicella zoster virus (VZV). It is often a mild illness, but may be severe in infants, pregnant women, adults, and individuals with weakened immune systems.

Mode of Transmission

Chickenpox is spread by direct contact with secretions (such as saliva) or a pox from an infected individual, or by respiratory secretions released into the air from sneezing or coughing. Shingles, a painful skin rash caused by the same virus (VZV) can cause chickenpox in someone who has never had chickenpox or the varicella vaccine if there is direct contact to the blister rash. Therefore, shingles lesions should remain covered to reduce risk of exposure.

Incubation Period

10-21 days

Typical Symptoms

- Itchy rash
- Fever
- Fatigue
- Fluid-filled blisters/pox (varies from few to hundreds of pox)

Duration of Illness

Usually 5-7 days

Length of Infectiousness

Infected persons are contagious from 1 to 2 days before the rash appears and until all the pox have formed scabs. Usually 5 days from the time the pox appeared. People with weakened immune systems may require more time for their pox to scab over.

Treatment

For most people, chickenpox is a self-limited illness that can be managed with over-the-counter analgesics and topical itch relief lotions. In severe cases, complications such as bacterial skin infections and pneumonia can occur.

Diagnosis

Chickenpox is typically diagnosed by the symptoms and the characteristic appearance of the rash. Occasionally a healthcare provider will use laboratory tests if the diagnosis is unclear or the illness is severe.

Immunity

For most people, getting chickenpox once provides immunity for life. However, for a few people, they can get chickenpox more than once, although this is not common. Vaccination protects yourself and others in your community. This is especially important for people who cannot get vaccinated, such as those with weakened immune systems or pregnant women. Some people who are vaccinated against chickenpox may still get the disease. However, it is usually milder with fewer red pox or blisters and little or no fever.

When to report to Clark County Public Health (CCPH)

Schools are required to report the presence of a contagious disease at the facility to their local health jurisdiction per [Washington Administrative Code \(WAC\) 246-110-020](#).

In Clark County schools are required to report the following:

- Suspect (not provider diagnosed) and confirmed (provider diagnosed) cases of chickenpox or shingles.

In the event of an outbreak, CCPH will work with the school to determine appropriate response and need for additional control measures based on CDC and Washington Department of Health recommendations. Control measures will be determined on a case-by-case basis in response to that particular outbreak. All control measures should be continued until the outbreak is over.



All schools should immediately report suspect and/or confirmed cases of chickenpox/shingles to the CD Program at (360) 397-8182.

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Before an Outbreak Occurs

A single case of chickenpox (varicella) in the school setting is a potential source for an outbreak.

Schools should have policies and procedures in place for:

- Tracking the number of individual cases of chickenpox in each school setting.
- Utilizing [CDC recommendations](#) to guide your school's response.
- Excluding students with suspected or provider diagnosed cases of chickenpox. See the [Infectious Disease Control Guide for School Staff](#).
- Excluding school age siblings of a child with chickenpox who do not have evidence of immunity (history of disease or record of one dose of the varicella vaccine). CCPH will assist schools in implementation and management of this exclusion recommendation. Call CCPH at (360) 397-8182 for assistance.
- Managing staff and student vaccination records. CCPH recommends School District Human Resource Departments maintain vaccine records for all of the district staff and School Health Services maintain vaccine records for all student enrollments.
- Managing staff/students without evidence of varicella immunity in situations of outbreak. CCPH will assist schools in implementation and management of these exclusion recommendations.

What to do when you have a single case of chickenpox/shingles in your school

For suspect or confirmed cases of chickenpox/shingles:

- Complete the [Chickenpox/Shingles Reporting Form](#) and fax to CCPH at (360) 397-8080.
- For suspect cases, send parents/families of medically fragile or immunocompromised students and any pregnant students or staff members, who may have been exposed to the suspect case, information about the possible exposure and include copies of the [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQ\)](#).
- For confirmed cases, distribute a notification letter to all parents/families whose child may have been exposed. Remember, chickenpox is typically contagious 2-days prior to the onset of rash. Use this guideline for determining exposure date and appropriate target audiences for receiving the letters regarding possible exposure to chickenpox (i.e. classrooms, grade levels, entire school population). A notification letter template is available at: <https://www.clark.wa.gov/public-health/resources>

For cases of shingles in the school setting:

- Students/staff with diagnosed shingles are permitted to attend school/work as long as lesions can remain covered.
- If lesions cannot be covered students/staff should be excluded until all lesions are scabbed over.

During an Outbreak

- Notify your facility licensor or certifier of an outbreak (if you have one).
- Follow the CDC's [Strategies for the Control and Investigation of Varicella Outbreaks Manual](#).
- Continue reporting all suspected and confirmed cases of chickenpox to CCPH.
- Follow the instructions from CCPH for notifying parents/families/staff and implementing exclusion of unvaccinated students/staff.
- Provide regular communication with School District Administration and your Public Information Officer regarding the status of the outbreak and the control measures being implemented.

After an Outbreak

- Evaluate your school's response.
- Develop action plans to address any identified areas of concern regarding school's readiness and response.
- Don't hesitate to use CCPH as a resource for reviewing outbreak response or supporting training needs.

For additional information visit:

- <https://www.clark.wa.gov/public-health/resources> for resources, tools and templates.
- <http://www.cdc.gov/chickenpox/about/index.html>