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Division of Health

FACTS&details

about Sedgwick County Government

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Chickenpox (Varicella)

What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a contagious disease caused by the varicella-zoster virus. The medical name for chickenpox is varicella.

How common is chickenpox?

Since the varicella vaccine in 1995, chickenpox cases are less common in the United States, and severe illness is rare.

How do people become infected?

Chickenpox is spread from person to person by sneezing or coughing or through close contact with blisters.

What are the signs and symptoms of chickenpox?

A rash first appears on the trunk and face. In unvaccinated people, the rash can spread over the entire body causing between 250 and 500 blisters. Other symptoms may include a high fever, severe itching, dehydration, or headache. In children who have been vaccinated, chickenpox is typically mild, with less than 50 red bumps or blisters.

How long can a person spread the virus?

After exposure, symptoms appear between 10 and 21 days. Someone with chickenpox is contagious one to two days before the rash appears until all blisters have formed scabs.

Who is at risk for chickenpox?

People who are unvaccinated are at risk for getting chickenpox. People at increased risk for severe disease include people with weakened immune systems, pregnant women, and newborns exposed to varicella or herpes zoster.

How is chickenpox treated?

Chickenpox is caused by a virus, so antibiotics won't work. For people with serious illness, healthcare providers may prescribe medications.

Remedies that may relieve symptoms include:

- Apply calamine lotion and oatmeal baths to relieve itching
- Keep child's fingernails short to reduce infections due to scratching
- Use non-aspirin medications, such as acetaminophen, to reduce fever. Due to the risk of Reye's syndrome, aspirin and other medications containing salicylate should not be given to children.

How can you prevent chickenpox?

The best way to prevent chickenpox is by vaccination.

Make sure your shots are up to date. Varicella vaccine can be obtained from the Sedgwick County Division of Health, 2716 West Central Ave, Wichita, Kansas.

- First varicella dose recommended at age 12-15 months.
- Second varicella dose recommended at age 4-6 years.
- Anyone age 13 years or older who has never been vaccinated or had chickenpox should be vaccinated.

For More Information:

Sedgwick County Division of Health
Epidemiology Program

316-660-7300

1900 E. 9th St., Wichita, Kansas 67214

www.sedgwickcounty.org