

Ferndale School District Student Health Services

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Three Cascadia students were recently diagnosed with chickenpox (varicella). We have been in contact with the Whatcom County Health Department. Chickenpox is a disease caused by a virus. It spreads easily from person to person. In healthy people chickenpox usually causes a mild illness, but sometimes it is a serious illness, especially in adults, teenagers, pregnant women and immunocompromised people. Here is some basic information about chickenpox. Please call your child's healthcare provider for special advice.

What are the signs of the disease? Chickenpox usually begins with a mild fever, tiredness, and a rash. The rash begins as red bumps that quickly turn into small blisters. These blisters form scabs in 3 - 4 days.

How does it spread? Chickenpox is usually spread through sneezing, coughing or direct contact with the blisters. It can also spread through the air.

When is the person infectious? People with chickenpox can spread the disease for 1-2 days before the beginning of the rash until 6 days after the rash starts.

How long does it take to break out? Chickenpox develops within 2 – 3 weeks after contact with an infectious person.

What should I do if my child gets chickenpox?

- Tell your child care provider.
- Keep your child at home until all blisters have scabbed over (usually about 6 days).
- Keep your child away from others who have not had the disease or the vaccine.
- Ask a healthcare provider or pharmacist about which over the counter medicines are safe to give your child when he or she has chickenpox. Aspirin is not recommended.
- Call a healthcare provider immediately if the rash suddenly becomes red, swollen, develops pus, or a high fever occurs.

Can chickenpox be prevented?

- Chickenpox vaccine is part of the routine childhood immunization schedule.
- The vaccine can be used to prevent or modify the illness if used within **3 – 5 days after exposure**. It is 70-90% effective when given after exposure.
- **Getting the vaccine now may not prevent disease from this exposure but will likely prevent getting chickenpox from other exposures and possibly prevent an outbreak in our school. During an outbreak unvaccinated children may be excluded from classes for up to 21 days after their last exposure.**
- Some people (pregnant women and people with diseases that weaken their immune system) who haven't had chickenpox disease or vaccine may need to get a special shot.
- Ask your healthcare provider about these shots.

Sincerely,

Kelly Parsons, School Administrator and Sandy Bird, School Nurse