

# Chickenpox Alert

## Information for Parents

This is to advise you that there has been a case of

- What is chickenpox?** Chickenpox, also called varicella, is a viral disease that can spread easily and quickly from person to person. The disease is most common among children under 15 years old. Serious complications are rare, but are more common in newborns, pregnant women, people with weakened immune systems, and adults.
- What are the symptoms?** People with chickenpox get an itchy rash that looks like tiny blisters. The rash usually starts on the face, stomach, chest or back, and spreads to other parts of the body. A mild fever, tiredness, and slight body discomfort usually come with the rash. Symptoms usually begin about 10 – 21 days after exposure to the virus.
- How is chickenpox spread?** Chickenpox is spread from person to person by coughing, sneezing, or touching the rash. People with chickenpox can spread the disease from 1–2 days before symptoms start until all the lesions are crusted over, which usually takes 5 days. Under state regulations, people with chickenpox must stay out of school and work and refrain from public activities until all their blisters have dried and crusted.
- Who gets chickenpox?** Anyone who has never had chickenpox and has never been vaccinated against chickenpox can get the disease. Sometimes, even people who have been vaccinated will still get chickenpox (called “breakthrough” chickenpox). Breakthrough disease is usually milder, but it is still contagious.
- How can you prevent chickenpox?** A vaccine is available to prevent chickenpox. Additionally, when people receive chickenpox vaccine within 3 (and possibly up to 5) days of being in contact with someone with chickenpox, it decreases their chances of getting chickenpox.
- What should pregnant women or those with weakened immune systems do?** Newborns, pregnant women, and some people with weakened immune systems cannot receive chickenpox vaccine. Individuals meeting any of these high risk criteria that have been in contact with someone with chickenpox and do not have history of chickenpox should contact their physician. These individuals may not be able to receive the vaccine, but may get a shot of antibodies to chickenpox called VZIG (varicella-zoster immune globulin), or intravenous immunoglobulin (IVIG) if VZIG is not available, to lower the chances of severe complications. VZIG or IVIG should be given within 10 days of exposure.
- What should I do if my child gets chickenpox?** Please keep your child at home and call your doctor. Also, keep all chickenpox lesions and other wounds clean and watch for possible signs of infection, including increasing redness, swelling, drainage and pain at the wound site. A person with an infected wound, especially if fever develops, should seek medical care. Good hand washing and covering your mouth when coughing can help prevent the spread of infections. Thoroughly wash your hands and children’s hands after wiping noses and before eating or preparing food. Do not share food, cups, spoons, or drinking straws.
- What should parents do?**
- If your child does not have serologic evidence of immunity (a blood test), a history of chickenpox as verified by a healthcare provider, or documentation of at least one dose of chickenpox vaccine, we encourage you to have your

child vaccinated (if eligible) to prevent future disease. Children can be vaccinated for chickenpox at one year of age.

- If your child has already received one dose of chickenpox vaccine, you should talk with your provider about your child receiving a second dose of vaccine.

For more information, please call your local board of health or MDPH at (617) 983-6800.