

# Varicella (Chickenpox)



## **Clinical Description:**

Varicella is a viral illness that is very contagious and is caused by the herpes zoster virus. Early symptoms can include fever and fatigue which begin about 10 - 21 days after exposure. These symptoms are followed by the appearance of flat, red spots which progress to an itchy rash with fluid-filled vesicles that are characteristic of the disease. Lesions appear in crops over several days and lesions will be present in several stages of development. As varicella vaccine coverage increases, most cases are now break-through cases, which are often less severe (less than 50 lesions and do not progress to the vesicular stage). Varicella can cause serious complications including pneumonia, encephalitis, secondary bacterial infections, and even death.

## **Incubation Period:**

The incubation period normally ranges from 10 - 21 days, but most commonly 14 - 16 days.

## **Mode of Transmission:**

Transmission occurs primarily through contact with infectious respiratory secretions and airborne droplets. Direct contact with open vesicles can also transmit infection.

## **Period of Communicability:**

A person can spread the herpes zoster virus 1 - 2 days before the onset of the rash until all of the lesions have crusted over or faded, typically seven days.

## **Exclusion/Reporting:**

Infected persons are excluded from schools and day care centers, public gatherings, and contact with susceptible persons until vesicles become dry, or in cases of mild, "break-through" disease, until the lesions have faded or disappeared. For more information, please see the ISDH Communicable Disease Reporting Rule (410 IAC 1-2.3-110) at [http://www.in.gov/isdh/files/comm\\_dis\\_rule\(1\).pdf](http://www.in.gov/isdh/files/comm_dis_rule(1).pdf).

## **Prevention/Care:**

- Vaccinate with a single dose of live, attenuated varicella vaccine at 12 - 15 months of age and revaccinate with a second dose at 4 - 6 years of age. School immunization requirements for varicella can be found at <http://bit.ly/1rFzDxD>.
- Review immunization records to identify susceptible individuals or those who have received only one dose of varicella vaccine.
- Varicella vaccine can be administered within 3 - 5 days of an exposure to prevent or modify the severity of disease.
- School personnel planning a pregnancy should be immunized one month prior to pregnancy.
- Promptly report all suspected individual cases and outbreaks to the local health department. Laboratory testing is recommended during outbreak situations.
- Consider sending letter to parents as determined to be necessary. Sample letter available from the ISDH. (See Appendix A: Managing an Infectious Disease Outbreak In a School Setting for more information.)

**Outbreaks:**

According to the ISDH Communicable Disease Reporting Rule (410 IAC 1-2.3), an outbreak is defined as the number of cases of disease occurring in a community, region, or particular population that exceeds what is normally expected. An outbreak of varicella is defined as five (5) or more cases epidemiologically linked in persons younger than 13 years of age; or three (3) or more epidemiologically linked cases in persons over 13 years of age. Any case or suspected case is to be immediately reported to the local health department and/or the ISDH. For additional information and recommendations regarding the preparation for, and the management of an outbreak situation in a school setting, see Appendix A, "Managing an Infectious Disease Outbreak In a School Setting."

**Other Resources:**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

<http://www.cdc.gov/chickenpox/about/index.html>

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/pinkbook/downloads/varicella.pdf>

Indiana State Department of Health Quick Facts Page (found on disease/condition page):

<http://bit.ly/12IJLfD>

Photographs of Disease/Condition:

<http://www.vaccineinformation.org/photos/varicdc006a.jpg>