

CANNON FALLS AREA SCHOOLS

Health Office

Dear Parent/Guardian: There is a child in your child's class who has been diagnosed with chickenpox.

CHICKENPOX

Chickenpox is one of the most common childhood infections. It is highly contagious, but rarely serious for most children. Chickenpox can, however, be severe in newborns and those with weak immune systems. Most people have had chickenpox by the time they are adults. When it does occur in adults, however, it may be more severe.

CAUSE: *Varicella zoster virus*, a member of the herpes virus family.

SYMPTOMS: Fever and skin rash that begins on the chest, back, underarms, neck, and face. It starts out as red bumps, which turn into small blisters within several hours, and then scab over after a few days.

SPREAD: Person-to-person by direct contact with the blister fluid or secretions from the nose or mouth of an infected person. Occasionally, airborne spread occurs from secretions from the nose or mouth.

INCUBATION: It takes from 10 to 21 days (more commonly 14 to 16 days) after being exposed until symptoms develop.

CONTAGIOUS PERIOD: From one to two days before the rash begins, and not more than five days after the appearance of the first blisters.

EXCLUSION FROM SCHOOL: Until day six after the rash began or sooner, if all the blisters have dried into scabs. Immunocompromised persons with chicken pox should be excluded until blisters have stopped occurring. Children who appear to have chickenpox should be excluded whether or not they have received varicella vaccine, since vaccine failure occasionally occurs. Exposed children without symptoms do not need to stay home unless chickenpox develops.

PREVENTION /CONTROL:

1. When a pregnant woman or a person with a weak immune system who has not had chickenpox is exposed, he or she should contact a physician immediately for possible treatment.
2. If you suspect that your child has chickenpox, you may wish to contact your healthcare provider. **Please do not go to the healthcare provider's office without calling first. They will want to keep your child separate from others to prevent further spread.**
3. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after contact with secretions from the nose or mouth or blister fluid.
4. All children should be routinely vaccinated at 12 to 18 months of age with one dose of varicella vaccine. Unvaccinated children 12 months to 12 years of age, who do not have a reliable history of chickenpox, should receive one dose of varicella vaccine. Susceptible persons 13 years of age and older should receive two doses of vaccine, 4 to 8 weeks apart.
5. Administration of varicella vaccine is not recommended to prevent disease in someone who has not had chickenpox and has recently been exposed to chickenpox virus.
6. Treatment: Discuss supportive therapy with your health care provider.

CAUTION: DO NOT GIVE ASPIRIN TO ANY CHILD OR ADOLESCENT UNDER 18 YEARS OF AGE. There is a risk of developing Reye's syndrome (a serious condition which can cause death) when children or adolescents take aspirin for viral illnesses such as chickenpox or influenza.