

Chickenpox (*Varicella zoster*)

An illness requiring airborne precautions

This handout describes chickenpox and its symptoms. It explains how the disease is spread and how to keep it from spreading to others.

What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a disease that is caused by the *Varicella zoster* virus. People usually get chickenpox in childhood. Most times, these people are not at risk of catching the disease again.

People whose immune systems are weakened from illnesses or medicines they take can have serious health problems if they get chickenpox. Some of these are skin infections caused by bacteria (germs), swelling of the brain, and pneumonia (lung infection).

Doctors advise people who have not had chickenpox to get a vaccine that prevents the disease. The vaccine is strongly advised for children, healthcare workers, teachers, daycare workers, residents and staff in institutions (such as nursing homes or prisons), college students, military personnel, and people who travel to other countries.

What are the symptoms?

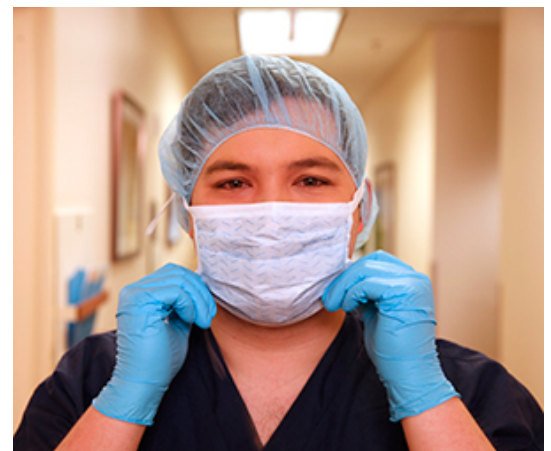
People with chickenpox have a skin rash of blister-like *lesions* (sores) on their face, scalp, back, and chest. These lesions do not always appear all at once.

How is it spread?

Chickenpox is very contagious. It spreads:

- Through the air when an infected person coughs, talks, or sneezes.
- From direct contact with the fluid-filled lesions.

A person with chickenpox is contagious 1 to 2 days before their rash appears and until all blisters have formed scabs.



Anyone who has been exposed to chickenpox should wear a mask to keep from spreading the disease.



To Learn More

To learn more about chickenpox, visit www.cdc.gov/chickenpox/index.html.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Infection Prevention:
206.598.6122

It takes from 8 to 21 days after contact with an infected person for someone to show symptoms of chickenpox.

People who have been exposed to chickenpox should:

- **Wear a mask**
- **Wash their hands often**
- **Place used tissues in wastebaskets when they come to the hospital or a clinic**

You can find tissues, masks, and hand gel at hygiene stations placed throughout UW Medical Center and at clinic front desks. And, you can pick up a free “Cover Your Cough” kit” at the Information Desk or clinic.

How is it diagnosed?

Chickenpox is diagnosed by its symptoms, the appearance of the lesions, and by having specimens from the lesions tested in the laboratory.

How are others protected from chickenpox?

At UW Medical Center, we place an “Airborne Precautions” sign near the door of your room. This sign tells healthcare staff and your visitors to observe these precautions when caring for you.

If you are in airborne precautions:

- Healthcare workers, caregivers, and visitors should **not** enter your room if they have never had chickenpox. Anyone who enters your room should wear the provided protective items – masks, eye protection, gowns, and gloves. They should also wash their hand when leaving
- In an emergency, healthcare workers who are at high risk, who have not had the disease ,may put on a respirator before entering your room.
- **We advise hand washing for 15 seconds, using alcohol hand gels, and environmental cleanliness.**
- We will ask you to stay in your room unless you need to go to other areas of the hospital for treatment. If you leave your room, we will ask you to wash your hands and wear a yellow gown, gloves, and a mask.
- Please do **not** use the nutrition rooms. When you want a snack or ice water, ask a member of your care team to bring it to you.

When can precautions be stopped?

Airborne precautions for chickenpox may be stopped when all of your lesions are dry and have scabs.