

## **Chickenpox (Varicella)**

Chickenpox is a common disease of childhood caused by a virus. It is very contagious. If exposed to chickenpox, your child may develop symptoms from 1-1/2 to 3 weeks later.

Chickenpox usually starts with a mild fever for 1-2 days followed by eruption of small fluid-filled blisters of the skin. They may also occur in the scalp, mouth, eye, and genital areas. These blisters break easily and become scab covered sores which usually itch. Crops of blisters continue to erupt for 3-7 days and during this time your child may easily infect other people who have not had chickenpox. Children who have chickenpox are contagious until all blisters have crusted over. Your child is no longer contagious and may return to school at the dry crusted stage.

Because chickenpox is a viral infection, there is no specific treatment available. General treatment is aimed at relieving the discomfort of itching. Suggestions are:

- \* Trim fingernails and keep hands clean to minimize scratching and prevent infection.
- \* Cool water baths with or without baking soda (1-2 cups per tubful several times a day).
- \* Calamine lotion to areas of itching.
- \* Benadryl is a medication to relieve itching. Benadryl Elixir is available for infants and young children without prescription. Benadryl tablets are available for older children or adolescents.
- \* If fever develops and the child is uncomfortable, use Tylenol. Aspirin should not be given to children with chickenpox or any other viral infection.
- \* In 1995, the American Academy of Pediatrics endorsed the use of Varivax for the prevention of chickenpox. It is 98% effective and is given at 12 months or later and a booster is given at the 4 year check-up. It is available in our office.