**Chicken Pox (Varicella virus)**

**What is it?**
- Chicken pox is a common, preventable infection caused by the varicella zoster virus. Chicken pox is often characterized by its contagious, itchy rash.
- The infection is usually mild in children. But newborn babies and adults can become very sick if they get chickenpox.
- Chicken pox is most common in the late winter and early spring.

**Signs and symptoms?**
- Begins with a mild fever followed by small, fluid filled spots that show up all over the body.
- Spots commonly occur in successive crops and crust over in four to five days.
- Some people have only a few blisters. Other people can have hundreds.
- The chickenpox rash is very itchy.

**How is it spread?**
- Chickenpox spreads easily. It jumps from person to person in two ways:
  - Through direct contact with the virus, when someone touches the blisters.
  - Through saliva droplets in the air, when someone with chickenpox sneezes, coughs, or even talks.
- The virus spreads most easily one or two days before the rash appears.
- A child with chickenpox can give the infection to other people until the blisters have dried up.

**Long term**
- The virus that causes chicken pox remains in our bodies without causing any problems.
- When we get older or when our immune system becomes weakened, the virus can reappear and cause shingles.
- Shingles are very painful.

**How to decrease the spread?**
- There is a vaccine to prevent chickenpox. To find out more about this vaccination, contact your Health Care Provider or Public Health
- Take good care of the skin and make sure your child does not scratch it.
- A child who scratches a lot may get infections caused by bacteria that get into the skin.

**Pregnant women**
- Pregnant women can develop severe chickenpox and pass it on to her unborn baby or new born after birth
- Mothers with chickenpox can also give it to their newborn babies after birth
- Consult your doctor as soon as possible if you are thinking of getting pregnant and have not had chickenpox.
- Separate bullet point: If you are exposed to chickenpox, call your doctor right away. A blood test can determine if you have the antibodies to protect you from the virus

**Recommended Absence:**
- Students and staff with mild illness may return to school and/or daycare as soon as they are well enough to participate in normal activities, regardless of the state of the rash.

Chicken pox must be reported to the Medical Officer of Health as required by the Health Promotion and Protection Act.

**Resources:**
www.caringforkids.cps.ca

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