

Mission:

To protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.



Ron DeSantis
Governor

Joseph A. Ladapo, MD, PhD
State Surgeon General

Vision: To be the **Healthiest State** in the Nation

Chickenpox (Varicella Zoster)

What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a disease caused by the varicella zoster virus. It causes a rash and fever and can be serious, especially in babies and adults. The chickenpox vaccine protects against this disease. Although some vaccinated children (about 2%) will still get chickenpox, they generally will have a much milder form of the disease, with fewer blisters (typically fewer than 50), lower fever, and a more rapid recovery.

What are the symptoms of chickenpox?

Chickenpox causes a rash of itchy blisters. It appears first on the face, chest, and back, and then spreads throughout the body. A person can have 250 to 500 blisters. The rash can spread over the whole body, even inside the mouth. Chickenpox also causes fever, headache, and tiredness. People are usually sick for 5 to 10 days.

How serious is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is usually a mild disease in children. But the itching can be very uncomfortable. Children with chickenpox miss many days of school or childcare. The disease can also cause serious problems, which include the following:

- Bacterial infection of the skin and tissues under the skin (including Group A streptococcal infections)
- Dehydration (loss of body fluids) from vomiting or diarrhea
- Pneumonia (lung infection)
- Encephalitis (brain swelling)

About 1 out of 500 unvaccinated children who get chickenpox will need hospital care. Most cases are mild, but some can be deadly.

How does chickenpox spread?

Chickenpox spreads easily through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It can also spread by touching fluid from blisters. Children with chickenpox will be excluded from school or childcare for at least a week to avoid spreading the virus to others.

Why should my child get the chickenpox vaccine?

The chickenpox vaccine protects against an uncomfortable and sometimes serious disease. Before the chickenpox vaccine was available, about 11,000 people in the U.S. needed hospital care each year for chickenpox, and about 100 people died each year of chickenpox.

Florida Department of Health**Alachua County**

224 SE 24th Street • Gainesville, FL 32641
PHONE: 352-334-7900 • Alachua.floridahealth.gov

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If my child does not get the chickenpox vaccine, will he get the disease?

Before there was a vaccine, almost everyone got chickenpox. It was one of the most common childhood diseases. With the vaccine, cases of chickenpox have dropped by about 90%. But if parents don't vaccinate their children, cases could go up again.

Exclusions

Please exclude your child from school with fever or other illnesses. Most illnesses are most infectious in the early stages. Please contact your child's health care provider with any on-going illness concerns.

High risk patients

Infants, pregnant women, and immunocompromised people without evidence of immunity are at highest risk for severe varicella. Serious complications include cerebellar ataxia, encephalitis, hemorrhagic conditions, pneumonia, and secondary bacterial infections of skin lesions, sometimes resulting in bacteremia or sepsis. Pregnant women may experience serious complications including congenital varicella syndrome, preterm delivery, and varicella infection in the newborn.

Where can I receive the varicella vaccine?

The Florida Department of Health in Alachua County, Alachua Clinic, located at 15530 NW US Hwy 441 #10010, Alachua, FL 32615, will be offering a vaccine clinic for those who would like to receive the varicella vaccine. Please call 386-462-2542 to schedule an appointment.

For any questions or concerns, please call the Epidemiology Program of the Alachua County Health Department, 352-225-4167 or 352-225-4181.

Thank you for contributing to keeping our school settings healthy.