Chickenpox

Dear Parents/Caregivers

There has been a case of chickenpox reported in your child’s class this week. We ask that you please check your child for any signs of a rash or blisters (the rash will first appear on the trunk of the body rather than the limbs). Children may also suffer from coughing and a runny nose.

Children affected must be taken to a doctor for correct diagnosis and then kept home until appropriate treatment has been completed. Parents are requested to ensure that the child is no longer contagious (around five days after the rash first appears) before the child returns to College. If an affected child is noticed at school, he/she will be isolated from the other children and parents/caregivers will be contacted and requested to collect the child.

Please assist us in eradicating chickenpox from the College. Notify us immediately if you notice that your child has this condition. This will enable us to control any outbreaks quickly. Your information will be treated in strict confidence.

Please contact the College if you have any queries or concerns.

I have included up-to-date information for parents (please see over).

Yours sincerely

Don Grimmett
Principal
CHICKENPOX

Chickenpox (varicella) is a viral infection caused by the varicella-zoster virus.

How Chickenpox is Spread
Chickenpox is spread when an infected person talks, breathes, coughs or sneezes tiny particles containing infectious agents into the air. These are called small particle aerosols. Due to their tiny size, small particle aerosols can travel long distances on air currents and remain suspended in the air for minutes to hours. These small particle aerosols may be breathed in by another person. Chickenpox is also spread by contact with or breathing in blister fluid.

Signs and Symptoms
Symptoms of chickenpox may include:

- Slight fever and cold-like symptoms, followed by a rash (see image).
- A rash that appears as blisters which crust to form scabs and is usually itchy.
- Crops of blisters that may appear over several days and various stages of blisters may be present. The rash is usually more noticeable on the trunk than on the limbs. It may affect the scalp and the inside of the mouth, nose, and throat.

In childhood, chickenpox is usually a mild illness and can be so mild it might not be noticed. Infection in adults is uncommon, since more than 95% of unimmunised Australians get the infection in childhood. Chickenpox in adults is more severe and may be complicated by pneumonia (lung infection or inflammation).

Chickenpox may be particularly severe in children with leukaemia, pregnant women and young babies. Congenital malformation of the foetus may occur in up to 2% of pregnancies where chickenpox occurs in early pregnancy. If chickenpox occurs around the time of delivery, the baby may become infected and up to 30% of newborns will become severely ill.

Diagnosis
Chickenpox have a typical appearance and are usually diagnosed by clinical presentation. A blood test can detect if someone has protection from chickenpox infection in the past, but the test may not be helpful in determining if there is adequate immunity to varicella-zoster virus following vaccination.

Incubation Period (time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)
10 to 21 days, commonly 14 to 16 days, but may vary in people whose immune system is suppressed.

Infectious Period (time during which an infected person can infect others)
For chickenpox, from 2 days before the rash appears until at least 5 days after the rash first appears and all blisters have crusted over.

Treatment
Specific antiviral treatment for chickenpox is available. Treatment is usually only given to those with severe disease or at risk of severe disease. To be effective, treatment must be commenced early, usually within 24 hours of onset of the rash.

For all cases, calamine lotion or promethazine [Phenergan] (available from pharmacies) may be useful for the itch. If treatment to reduce temperature or discomfort is necessary, paracetamol is recommended. Aspirin should not be given to children or adolescents who have chickenpox or shingles.