

Date

Dear Parent,

Recently there have been cases of chickenpox in your child's school. Peel Health would like to provide you with information about this common childhood illness.

Chickenpox is caused by the varicella-zoster virus. In children, this usually results in a mild illness starting with a slight fever, fatigue, headache, and/or a runny nose. This is followed in a day or two by a red spotty rash which turns into small, itchy, fluid-filled blisters. Eventually the blisters dry up and crust over. The symptoms may be more severe in adults. Serious complications from chickenpox are rare but can include pneumonia (lung infection), encephalitis (inflammation of the brain), and bacterial infection of the skin. In Canada, a few people die every year from chickenpox.

The disease is most contagious 1-2 days before the rash appears. Chickenpox virus spreads mainly through respiratory droplets in the air. The incubation period is 10-21 days. Most adults have already had the disease and will not get sick again if re-exposed.

Shingles (zoster) is caused by reactivation of the virus in someone who has previously had chickenpox. The rash appears on only one part of the body and severe pain at the rash site is common. It is possible to catch chickenpox from someone with shingles by direct contact with the rash. However, you cannot get shingles from exposure to someone else with shingles.

#### **What Can You Do After Exposure to Chickenpox?**

- The following people should contact their doctor for follow-up if they are exposed to chickenpox:
  - Women who are pregnant
  - Individuals who have an illness that suppresses their immune system (e.g. cancer, HIV)
- Watch your child for signs of chickenpox during the next two to three weeks after they have been exposed to it.
- If your child develops chickenpox, please tell the school.
- **There is no need to isolate a child with chickenpox. The child may return to school if s/he is feeling well enough to participate in activities as usual. This is because chickenpox has been shown to be most contagious 12-24 hours before the rash appears. Since the disease is usually diagnosed after the onset of the rash, excluding children with a rash is not effective in preventing transmission of the disease to others.**
- It is safe to use acetaminophen (Tylenol, Tempra, Panadol) to help control a fever from chickenpox. **Do not give aspirin** or any products that contain acetylsalicylic acid (ASA) to a child under the age of 18 since this can lead to serious complications.
- If blisters become infected or your child is very ill, contact your doctor for follow-up

#### **Prevention is Possible!**

There is a safe and effective chickenpox vaccine available! ***The vaccine is recommended for healthy individuals over the age of 12 months who have not yet had the disease.*** Call your doctor or Region of Peel – Public Health at 905-799-7700 for more information (Caledon residents, call free of charge at 905-584-2216).