



Alert: Chickenpox in Children in Hedland

November 4th 2020

There have been twenty confirmed cases of chickenpox in Hedland in September and October 2020. The **age range of cases is 5 to 14 years** (so both primary and secondary school children) with an average age of 9 years. Perth has also had a rise in cases over the past month. Some other children and adolescents have had suspected chicken pox, but it was not confirmed by a swab test with a doctor. There are many rashes that affect children and young adults from different causes, so it's important to test to check what it is.

Chickenpox causes a fever, sometimes a runny nose, sneezing and cough, and an itchy rash, which generally is widespread over the trunk, face, scalp, armpits, and limbs. It can be more severe where the skin is already inflamed e.g. with sunburn or other skin inflammation. The infection is passed from one person to another by coughing or sneezing or touching another person's infected skin or surfaces they have touched/coughed onto.

The rash is initially small red raised spots, then develops into small blisters, then pustules, and then scabs, dries and heals. The infection is usually mild in children but can be more severe in adults. The rash has new lesions occurring over several days so that overall it can last 7 to 10 days. It can also affect the eye, inside the mouth and the respiratory tract.

A virus called **Varicella Zoster** causes chickenpox. The WA childhood vaccination program now immunises children against chickenpox at 18 months of age. **Chickenpox can occur again in those who have had it previously, or in those who have been immunised, as immunity does wane over a few years.** However those who have had it before, or been immunized, usually have a milder and shorter illness.

If a parent/guardian notices a fever, runny nose, or cough, or a rash in their child, then they should keep them out of school. Please then take them to their General Practitioner for testing. (Please warn the GP surgery ahead of time so they know to take your child out of the waiting room quickly) Tests involve a swab from the throat and a swab from a skin spot. In children there is no need for a blood test. Testing is important so an outbreak of chicken pox can be identified quickly.

Children with symptoms will need to be kept at home away from other people until they get the test results. **If tests are negative** they can return to school when feeling better.

If the tests are positive they need to stay home until ALL the skin lesions have dried and crusted (about 7 days). Please keep your child at home until they are completely well and no further cough or fever or rash.

If your child has not had chicken pox but is in this age group, you can go to your GP or Aboriginal Medical Centre to check if they have had their first immunisation against chicken pox and to discuss getting a 'booster' vaccination to increase their immunity.

Please contact me or the school nurse if you have any queries. A link to a fact sheet is below.

http://www.healthywa.wa.gov.au/Healthy-WA/Articles/A_E/Chickenpox-varicella

Yours sincerely,

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