1. CHICKENPOX 2nd Class

Date: 7th February 2023

Dear Parent or Guardian,

There has been a case of chickenpox in your child's school and your child may have been exposed. If your child has not had chickenpox before it is quite likely that he/she will catch it.

What is chickenpox?
Chickenpox is a common childhood illness. Fever and cold symptoms are often the first signs of illness and are followed by the appearance of the typical rash. The rash starts as small pink bumps, often around the neck, ears, back and stomach. These develop a little water blister, which in turn becomes yellow and oozy and ultimately crusty as it dries. The rash spreads outwards to involve the whole body finally involving the lower arms and legs. People may have only a few spots or may be virtually covered with them. In children it is usually a relatively mild illness however occasionally complications develop.

Why should I be concerned about chickenpox?
Chickenpox can be a devastating infection in people with a seriously weakened immune system (e.g. patients with leukaemia or after organ transplantation).

In adults, chickenpox is a much more significant illness than in children and there is a greater risk of complications developing. Chickenpox in pregnancy may cause severe illness and, in the early stages of pregnancy, may result in abnormalities in the baby.

What should I do now?
If your child is normally healthy, chickenpox is likely to be a relatively mild illness and no specific precautions are necessary. Symptoms usually develop 10 to 21 days after exposure. The infected person can spread infection for up to three days before the rash appears and until the last pox is crusted and dry.

If your child has a weakened immune system, please contact your child's GP or hospital consultant and let them know that your child may have been exposed.

What should I do if I think my child has chickenpox?
If you suspect chickenpox, do not bring the child into a crowded surgery waiting room, as this may only spread the infection further. Contact your doctor to confirm the diagnosis. Do not use aspirin or any products that contain aspirin to control fever if your child has chicken pox, as this has been associated with the development of a rare but serious disease called Reye's syndrome.

Can my child stay in school?
Many children with chickenpox are too sick to attend school and are more comfortable at home. Children can spread the infection to others as long as there are any spots, which are not crusted and dried. Children with chickenpox should be excluded from school until scabs are dry; this is usually five to seven days after the appearance of the rash. Children with spots that are crusted and dried can safely attend school.

I am pregnant and have been exposed to a child with chickenpox. What should I do?

Most adults in Ireland are immune to chickenpox as they have had the illness in childhood. If you have not had chickenpox illness in the past and have had recent contact with chickenpox you should contact your GP, who may wish to do a blood test to check if you are immune. Chickenpox infection in pregnancy may cause more severe illness and there may be a risk to the foetus.

Thank you for giving this your attention. Your GP will be able to answer any further questions that you might have about chickenpox.