

10 august 2023

Dear families

The Ovens Murray Public Health Unit has become aware of an outbreak of chickenpox (also known as varicella) at the Wodonga Middle Years College.

### **What is chickenpox?**

Chickenpox is a highly contagious disease caused by the varicella-zoster virus (VZV). It can cause an itchy, blister-like rash and other symptoms. The rash first appears on the chest, back, and face, and then spreads over the entire body. While this is a common virus, newborn babies and people who are immunocompromised (weakened immune system) or pregnant are at risk of severe illness or death. Please see our factsheet attached for further information.

**The Ovens Murray Public Health Unit requests that if your child shows any symptoms of chickenpox to:**

- **Please stay home and follow good cleanliness practices such as washing hands carefully**
- **Children with chickenpox should stay home until all blisters have dried (usually takes at least 5 days after the rash appears in unimmunised children, but may be less in previously immunised children (see information below))**
- **Contact the school**
- **Isolate the child from household contacts as much as possible – particularly anyone who is pregnant, newborn babies or immunocompromised**
- **Contact anyone you know who has been in recent contact with the child – especially those who are newborn, immunocompromised or pregnant**
- **Go see your GP and ask the GP to perform a test to check for chickenpox**
- **If you are pregnant or immunocompromised and have had contact with someone who has chickenpox, speak with your GP, obstetrician or specialist for further advice**
- **Consider getting you, your child and any other household contact vaccinated (see information below).**

Although the chickenpox vaccine is given to younger children, during an outbreak situation, vaccinations can prevent further cases and reduce the likelihood and severity of the illness. The public health unit recommends that:

- parents of children who are not vaccinated should see your GP about vaccination,
- parents of children who have already had one dose of chickenpox vaccine consider seeing your GP about a second dose of the vaccine, which will provide further protection against chickenpox,
- people who have weakened immune systems or who are pregnant should not be given the vaccine and anyone receiving the vaccine should avoid becoming pregnant for at least 28 days after vaccination.

For further information please refer to the following links:

- Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2019 school exclusion table  
<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/infectious-diseases/school-exclusion-table>
- Chickenpox information sheet Better Health Channel  
<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/chickenpox>
- Chickenpox – immunisation sheet Better Health Channel  
<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/chickenpox-immunisation>

If you have any questions or concerns please contact the Ovens Murray Public Health Unit on (02) 6048 1000 or email [PHU@awh.org.au](mailto:PHU@awh.org.au).

With regards,  
Ovens Murray Public Health Unit