



Alert: Chickenpox Alert

December 5th 2018

There has been a confirmed case of chickenpox at Karratha Senior High School.

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. The incubation period is 2-3 weeks so if anyone was exposed recently they may not show symptoms until the end of September.

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 programme now immunizes children against chickenpox at 18 months of age, and in year 8 at school. **Chickenpox can occur again, in those who have had it previously, or been previously immunized, as immunity does wane over time.** However those who have had it before or been immunized, usually have a milder and shorter illness compared to those who have never had it before.

If parents or a guardian think that their child might have symptoms of the infection, then they should keep them out of school, and take them to their General Practitioner for testing. Tests involve a swab from the throat and a swab from a skin spot. In children there is no need for a blood test.

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 crusted.

Please ring me if you have any queries. A fact sheet from the Department of Health on the signs and symptoms of chickenpox is available at:

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

Yours sincerely,
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