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Chickenpox at School

Dear Parent/Guardian:

We regret to inform you that your child may have had a direct exposure to chickenpox at school.

Chickenpox is a highly contagious viral disease which usually begins with a mild fever and cold-like symptoms, followed by a rash which goes through several stages. The rash begins as dark red spots which change to tiny clear blisters that rapidly break and form crusts. It continues to erupt for two or three days so one may see all stages of sores at any one time. The symptoms (incubation period) will usually appear 14 to 16 days after exposure. (Can be 10-21 days)

Chickenpox is spread by direct contact with the moist sores as well as droplets in the air from coughing and sneezing. It can also be spread indirectly by contact with dishes, pencils, tissues and other articles contaminated by discharges from an infected person. Humans are the only source of infection.

A child with chickenpox is contagious (can spread the disease to others) for one to two days before and five or six days after the onset of the rash. In uncomplicated cases, children may return to school six days after the onset of the rash and when all lesions are crusted. In mild cases with only a few lesions, crusting may be completed before this time, in which case children may return earlier if clearance is obtained from the family physician.

Everyone is born without protection against the disease, but once contracted, immunity is usually life-long. Occasionally, the virus goes into a dormant stage and may recur years later as shingles (herpes-zoster).

Children should be kept home until all sores have crusted. Articles they have used should be washed and disinfected before reuse. Fingernails should be trimmed to help prevent secondary infection from scratching. Calamine lotion and frequent baths may help reduce itching. Rest, fluids, and adequate nutrition are important. **DO NOT GIVE ASPIRIN.** An association between aspirin and the development of Reye's syndrome has been demonstrated.

An antiviral medication is also available for treatment to reduce the symptoms of the disease; however it must be initiated within 24 hours after the onset of the rash. Your physician can best determine if this form of treatment is appropriate for your child.

Chickenpox vaccines are recommended during childhood immunizations to prevent this contagious disease.

Please feel free to contact your child's principal if you have any specific questions.