



February 23, 2015

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Your child may have been in contact with a case of varicella (chickenpox) at Westmount School in Okotoks. Chickenpox can be passed easily through coughing or sneezing, or by direct contact with fluid from the blisters of the skin rash. It can be spread to others from one to two days before the rash appears, until all blisters have scabbed over. Although chickenpox is normally a mild disease, serious complications can develop requiring hospitalization. Pregnant women or newborns that are not protected against chickenpox and individuals with a weakened immune system are at highest risk for serious complications. These include pneumonia, neurological conditions and severe bacterial skin infections.

Please observe your child closely for any symptoms of chickenpox. These include:

- fever, fatigue, headache
- followed by an itchy rash, mainly on the body and head

The rash appears as flat red spots that develop into raised fluid-filled blisters continuing to appear for three to four days, and gradually scabbing over.

Please call Health Link Alberta at 1-866-408-5465 (LINK) to report this illness.

Children with mild illness (e.g., no fever or fatigue) who feel well enough to participate fully in regular activities may be allowed to return to or remain in school or child care, even with rash. Please keep your child home from NEW activities where others have not previously been exposed to your child (e.g. weekly club or dance classes, public events) until your child's rash is scabbed over.

If your child develops the above symptoms and you decide to see a nurse or physician, please take this letter with you. It is recommended that the diagnosis of chickenpox be confirmed by sending the following specimens for laboratory testing:

- Skin lesion swabs for varicella PCR
- Throat swabs for viral testing to rule out enterovirus infection (which can look like chickenpox).

*We recommend that all children's immunizations be kept up-to-date. Adequate immunization for chickenpox is one dose of chickenpox vaccine on or after one year of age. For children born on or after August 1, 2005, a booster dose is recommended between four to six years of age. Please check your child's immunization record or contact your local Public Health Centre if you are unsure.*

If your child does not have any of the symptoms mentioned above, there is no need to see a nurse or physician for diagnosis. If you have any questions, or want to report a case of chickenpox, please call Health Link Alberta at 1-866-408-5465 (LINK).

Sincerely,

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Colleen Halpen, RNBN

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