



MINISTRY OF HEALTH UPDATE ON CHICKENPOX INFECTION IN VANUATU

The Ministry of Health would like to update the public on the current chickenpox situation in Vanuatu. From 4th – 27th March 2025, a total of 46 cases of Chicken pox have been reported to the National Surveillance Unit through the e-notification system: All 46 cases were detected in Shefa Province. Cases are also suspected in other areas.

Ministry of Health response:

Awareness is being conducted through the Ministry of Health official channels to sensitize the population on the facts and transmission mode of chicken pox including personal knowledge on household prevention and protection measures.

The Ministry of Health through the National Disease Surveillance Program is currently monitoring the situation across all the provinces.

What is chicken pox?

Chickenpox (Varicella) is an acute and highly contagious disease caused by the varicella-zoster virus (VZV) a member of the herpesvirus family and mainly affects children. Only one serotype of VZV is known and humans are the only reservoir. It can cause an itchy, blister-like rash among other symptoms.

How it is transmitted?

Chickenpox spreads easily from people with chickenpox to others who have never had the disease or never been vaccinated. The virus spreads mainly through close contact with some who has chickenpox.

What are the symptoms?

It takes about 2 weeks (from 10 to 21 days) after exposure to a person with chickenpox for someone to develop chicken pox. A person with chickenpox is considered contagious beginning 1 to 2 days before rash onset until all the chickenpox lesions have crusted (scabbed).

Chickenpox (Varicella) is characterized by an itchy, rash usually starting on the scalp and face and initially accompanied by fever and malaise. The rash gradually spreads to the trunk and extremities. The vesicles gradually dry out and crusts appear which then disappear over a period of one to two weeks.

Other symptoms that may begin to appear one to two days before rash include:

- Fever
- Tiredness
- Loss of appetite
- Headache

How is chickenpox treated?

Antiviral medications are recommended for people with chickenpox, non-aspirin medications such as acetaminophen are used to relieve fever. Do not use aspirin or aspirin containing products to treat symptoms of chickenpox as they can have health impacts on children.

How is chickenpox prevented?

The best way to prevent chickenpox is to get vaccinated. However, in Vanuatu chickenpox vaccine is not available therefore the Ministry of Health emphasizes the importance of early detection and proper clinical management.

Anyone who suspects that they have the symptoms of chickenpox infection should visit the nearest health facility immediately for accurate treatment and management. This is the key message which everyone must understand and comply with.

Updates will be provided as the situation evolves.

Note to editors

For more information go to:

- Visit your closest health facility
- Ministry of Health, Health Promotions Vanuatu Facebook page:
<https://www.facebook.com/Health-Promotions-Vanuatu-167426667566197/>
- Call Ministry of Health on 22512