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Media Contact: Melissa Morin, Communications Specialist
Phone: (360) 778-6022; (360) 594-2504
E-mail address: mmorin@whatcomcounty.us

Patients Concerned About Chickenpox Urged to Call Healthcare Provider First

BELLINGHAM, WA — The Whatcom County Health Department (WCHD) is urging members of the public who are experiencing symptoms of chickenpox to call ahead before visiting their healthcare provider, walk-in clinic, or the emergency room. Calling ahead gives providers the opportunity to take precautions that can keep others in clinic waiting rooms from being exposed to the virus, which is highly contagious.

The health department is asking people who might be sick with chickenpox or shingles to take this step in order to help prevent further spread of chickenpox, especially to those who might be in a waiting room seeking care for another illness or who are more likely to develop a more serious case of the disease. Pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems are among those who can develop a more severe illness.

Varicella, the virus that causes chickenpox and shingles, spreads very easily from person to person through sneezing, coughing or direct contact with chickenpox blisters. It can also spread through the air. People with chickenpox can spread the disease for 1-2 days before they develop the typical blistering rash and remain infectious for up to 6 days after the rash starts. Other symptoms of chickenpox include a mild fever and tiredness. It takes about two to three weeks for chickenpox symptoms to appear after being in contact with an infectious person.

The health department has been monitoring a slight increase in chickenpox illness in the community and is working with healthcare providers and schools on prevention measures. In addition to calling ahead before visiting their healthcare provider, anyone who suspects they might have chickenpox should stay home from work or school, avoid people who haven't been vaccinated or had the disease, and consider getting the chickenpox vaccine if they haven't already done so. Vaccine information can be found at www.vaccinefinder.org by searching for 'varicella'.

More information about chickenpox is available from the Washington State Department of Health at <https://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/IllnessandDisease/ChickenpoxVaricella>.

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