

chickenpox

WHAT IS CHICKENPOX?

Chickenpox is a very common infection in children. It is caused by the varicella-zoster virus. Chicken Pox infection is usually mild, but children with other medical problems and adults can become very sick. The virus that causes chicken pox can also cause the disease shingles in adults.

HOW CAN I TELL IF MY CHILD HAS CHICKENPOX?

Chickenpox usually starts with a fever. Children may complain of headaches, sore throat, sore joints and achy muscles. They will be tired and irritable, and may not be hungry. After a day or two a rash begins with very itchy spots that change to blisters in a few hours. The rash usually starts on the chest. Then spreads to the face, arms or legs. Within a few days the blisters will form brownish crusts (Scabs) that will eventually fall off. New spots will keep appearing for several days.

HOW CAN MY CHILD GET CHICKENPOX?

Chickenpox spreads very easily from one person to another, through the air or by direct contact with the fluid from blisters. The scabs do not spread the infection. Children can get chicken pox up to 2 to 3 weeks (the incubation period) after they are in contact with either chicken pox or shingles. The spread of chicken pox occurs mostly before the rash appears, so keeping the children home from school or daycare does not prevent the spread of infection. People who have had chicken pox will not likely get it again.

CAN I STOP ANYONE FROM GETTING CHICKENPOX?

It is usually difficult to stop chickenpox from spreading from one person to another, especially in places such as home, school or day care.

The following people are at risk if they are exposed to chicken pox or shingles. They should call their doctor or public health office right away:

- Adults, especially pregnant women who have never had chicken pox.

- Premature babies who are less than 4 months old.
- Newborn infants or mothers who develop chicken pox (from 5 days before to 2 days after delivery).
- People taking certain medicines for asthma or arthritis (steroids, aspirin, or immunosuppressants).
- People who have immune system problems.
- People who have had organ transplants.
- People who have cancer.

These people may need advice and treatment.

WHAT DO I DO IF MY CHILD GETS CHICKENPOX?

- Keep your child home from day care or school if your child does not feel well enough to participate in classroom activities. If there is a person at risk in the classroom or daycare your child may have to stay home. Notify your public health nurse, doctor, school and/or day care.
- Give your child lots of fluids, especially if your child has a fever. (38 Degrees Celsius or 100 Degrees Fahrenheit). He/she may not feel like taking solid foods, especially if there are chickenpox in the mouth.
- Give your child acetaminophen (Tylenol™, Tempra™, Panadol™) if your child is uncomfortable, or has a fever (38 Degrees Celsius or 100 Degrees Fahrenheit). Follow directions on the bottle, or those given by your doctor, for the right dose and how often you may repeat it.

Information is continued on the back side of this sheet.

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SAFETY TIPS

Keep medicine in child resistant container and locked up. Do not give Aspirin™ products (Acetylsalicylic acid, ASA) as it may cause Reyes Syndrome, a serious condition that can damage the liver and brain.

Keep your child clean and cool, continue to bathe as usual, and dress in light weight clothing.

To relieve itching and avoid scratching and scarring:

- Add baking soda or medicinal oatmeal (ask your pharmacist), to the bath water.
- Keep finger and toenails short and clean.
- Put socks and gloves on your child day and night if necessary.
- For serious itching your doctor may recommend medicine.
- Prevent infection by:
 - Washing your hands well after touching your child or articles that have been touched by your child. Clean these articles well.
 - Cleaning your tub daily with bleach solution made from: 1 part household bleach to 10 parts water.

WHEN SHOULD I CALL MY DOCTOR?

Contact your doctor or emergency department if your child:

- Is hard to awaken or is confused;
- Starts acting very sick;
- Has trouble walking;
- Has a stiff neck;
- Has difficult or fast breathing;
- Has a seizure (convulsion or fit);
- Vomits 3 or more times;
- Has scabs that become soft and drain pus;
- Has areas of skin that get red, swollen or painful;
- Has sores in the eyes;
- Has swollen and/or tender lymph nodes (glands) in the neck;
- Has severe pain when passing urine; or

- Has any of the above signs and as well has a temperature higher than 39 Degrees Celsius (102 Degrees Fahrenheit).



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