

Chickenpox (Varicella)

What is Chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a very contagious disease caused by the varicella zoster virus (VZV). It causes a rash and fever and can be serious, especially for babies, adolescents, adults, pregnant women, and people with weakened immune systems. Chickenpox normally lasts for 4 to 7 days.

What are the symptoms of Chickenpox?

The classic symptom of chickenpox is a rash that turns into itchy, fluid-filled blisters that eventually turn into scabs. The rash may first show up on the chest, back, and face, and then spread over the entire body, including inside the mouth, eyelids, or genital area. It usually takes about one week for all of the blisters to become scabs.

Other typical symptoms that may begin to appear 1-2 days before the rash include:

- Fever
- Tiredness
- Loss of appetite
- Headache

How does Chickenpox spread?

The virus can be spread from person to person by direct contact, inhalation of aerosols from vesicular fluid of skin lesions of acute varicella or zoster, and possibly through infected respiratory secretions that also may be aerosolized. A person with varicella is considered contagious beginning one to two days before rash onset until all the chickenpox lesions have crusted. Vaccinated people may develop lesions that do not crust. These people are considered contagious until no new lesions have appeared for 24 hours.

Is there a vaccine for Chickenpox?

Yes, there is a vaccine for chickenpox. Everyone—including children, adolescents, and adults—should get two doses of chickenpox vaccine if they have never had chickenpox or were never vaccinated.

Chickenpox vaccine is very safe and effective at preventing the disease. Most people who get the vaccine will not get chickenpox. If a vaccinated person does get chickenpox, the symptoms are usually milder with fewer or no blisters (they may have just red spots) and mild or no fever.

The chickenpox vaccine is given in two doses. The first dose should be given to children aged 12 to 15 months and the second dose should be given at 4 to 6 years of age. Older children and adults can also get the vaccine when recommended by a doctor.

The chickenpox vaccine can be given in a combined vaccine with the Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccine. The combined vaccine is called a MMRV.

Why not let children get Chickenpox naturally?

Chickenpox can be mild, but it can also be very serious. There is no way to predict who will have a mild case and who will become very sick.

How is Chickenpox treated?

Chickenpox can be treated with calamine lotions and colloidal oatmeal baths. The fever from chickenpox should be treated with non-aspirin medicines such as acetaminophen. Aspirin or products that contain aspirin should not be used to treat chickenpox as the use of aspirin with chickenpox can lead to a disease of the liver and brain.

You should contact your doctor if a person has chickenpox and develops:

- Fever that lasts longer than four days
- Fever above 102° F
- If part of the rash or body becomes red, warm, tender or leaks pus (thick, discolored fluid)
- Difficult waking up or confusion
- Difficulty walking
- Stiff neck
- Frequent vomiting
- Difficulty breathing
- Severe cough
- Severe abdominal pain
- Rash with bleeding or bruising
- Or if the person:
 - Is less than 1 year old
 - Is older than 12 years of age
 - Has a weakened immune system
 - Is pregnant



Healthcare providers can advise you on treatment options. Antiviral medications are recommended for people with chickenpox that are more likely to develop serious illness, including:

- Otherwise healthy people older than 12 years of age
- People with chronic skin or lung disease
- People receiving long-term salicylate therapy or steroid therapy
- Pregnant women
- People with a weakened immune system

For more information:

Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <https://www.cdc.gov/chickenpox/index.html> or call Huron County Public Health at 419-668-1652 ext. 269.