

Varicella (Chickenpox) Information Sheet

What is Chickenpox?

Varicella (chickenpox) is a highly contagious, vaccine preventable disease caused by the varicella zoster virus. The disease can be serious, especially for babies, adolescents, adults, pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems.

How can you catch Chickenpox?

Chickenpox is spread easily through the air when infected people cough or sneeze. Touching fluid from blisters can also spread the disease. An infected person can spread chickenpox to others from 1-2 days before the rash starts until the blisters are scabbed over (usually 5 days).

What are the symptoms of Chickenpox?

Most people show signs of this illness 10-21 days after they become infected. Chickenpox causes a rash that starts as bumps and turns into itchy blisters, which can spread over the whole body. Blisters eventually turn into scabs. Chickenpox can also cause fever, headache and tiredness. People with chickenpox are usually sick for 5 to 10 days.

How can you be treated for Chickenpox?

Calamine lotion and colloidal oatmeal baths may be used to relieve some of the itching. Non-aspirin medications, such as acetaminophen, can be used to relieve fever. Aspirin should be avoided. Contact your doctor if you are at risk for serious illness or if your symptoms become severe.

How can you prevent Chickenpox?

- **The best way to prevent chickenpox is to get 2 doses of the varicella vaccine.** The vaccine is safe and very effective at preventing this disease. The first dose is usually given at 12-15 months, the second dose 4-6 years of age (school entry). When you get vaccinated, you protect yourself and others in your community.
- If you have been diagnosed with chickenpox, be sure to stay home until the blisters have scabbed over.
- Pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems are at higher risk of complications and should call a healthcare provider if they are exposed to chickenpox.