

Chickenpox Fact Sheet



What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a common childhood viral illness. Most outbreaks occur in the winter and early spring.

Who gets chickenpox?

Chickenpox is most common in children under 15 years old, but can occur at any age. Once a person gets chickenpox, he usually won't get it again. The chickenpox vaccine works in most people. Those who get chickenpox after vaccination usually have a milder case of it.

It is possible to get chickenpox from having the vaccine. It is usually a milder form of the illness.

How do you get chickenpox?

Chickenpox is highly contagious. It is spread in one of the following ways:

- By direct contact with an infected person, usually through fluid from broken blisters.
- Through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes.
- By touching items freshly soiled by discharges from an infected person's blisters, nose or mouth.

A person who has chickenpox is contagious one to two days before the rash starts and for six days after the rash appears. He is no longer contagious when new sores stop appearing and all sores have crusted over. This is usually about 14 days after the rash begins.

What are the symptoms of chickenpox?

The first symptoms are:

- Slight fever
- Tiredness
- Weakness

These are soon followed by an itchy, blister-like rash. The rash may first appear on the upper body, then arms, legs, and face. The blisters eventually dry, crust over, and form scabs.

Other symptoms may include:

- Chills
- Headache
- Loss of appetite
- Fussiness

Symptoms usually start between 13 and 17 days after being exposed.

The Health Department does not diagnosis chickenpox.

How is chickenpox treated?

- Mild cases require only rest and plenty of fluids.
- Calamine lotion and oatmeal baths may help relieve some of the itching.
- Itching may be decreased by taking an antihistamine such as oral Benadryl.
- Use Tylenol to reduce fever and relieve minor aches and pains. Children and teens should **not** take aspirin.
- Keep fingernails trimmed short and clean to reduce the chance of getting

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an infection from scratching the blisters.

Do I need to keep my child home from school?

A child with chickenpox should be kept home from daycare or school for at least six days after the rash first appeared or until the blisters have crusted over, whichever comes first.

When should my child get the chickenpox vaccine?

All children should be routinely vaccinated between 12 and 18 months of age. Healthy people over the age of 13 who have no history of chickenpox and have never been immunized against the disease should get two doses of the vaccine four to eight weeks apart.

Should children and at risk people living in a home with a pregnant woman at risk be vaccinated?

Yes, at risk children living in a household with pregnant woman at risk should be vaccinated.

Pregnant women who have never had chickenpox are at risk of getting chickenpox during pregnancy. A small number of women who get chickenpox in the first or second trimester can have babies with birth defects known as “congenital varicella syndrome.” In addition, chickenpox may be more severe in pregnant women than in others. This puts the woman at risk of severe complications.

Vaccinating close contacts of a susceptible pregnant woman is the most effective way to protect her from disease. Although there

is a small risk that a vaccinated person could get a vaccine rash and spread the vaccine strain virus to the pregnant woman, this risk is much smaller than the risk than she could contract “natural” varicella.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for talking with a health care provider. If you have any questions about chickenpox or think you may have it, call your health care provider.