



Chickenpox (Varicella)

What is chicken pox?

Chickenpox causes an itchy rash of blisters and a fever. The rash can spread over the whole body—even inside the mouth, eyelids, or genital area. Chickenpox is usually a mild disease, but can be serious, especially in babies, pregnant females, adults, and people with weakened immune systems.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Chickenpox usually causes the following symptoms:

- An itchy rash of blisters
- Fever
- Headache
- Feeling tired

How is it spread?

Chickenpox spreads easily through the air when a person who has chickenpox coughs or sneezes. It can also spread by touching an infected person's blisters. Chickenpox can be spread 1 - 2 days before the infected person gets a rash until all the blisters have formed scabs (usually about 5 days).

Should a person with chicken pox be isolated?

A person with chickenpox should stay home from school, childcare or work for at least five days after the rash first appears AND until all the blisters have scabbed over.

What type of treatment and care should be given?

There is no specific treatment for chickenpox infection. To help relieve the symptoms:

- Rest and fluids are encouraged.
- The risk of skin infection from scratching can be reduced by the use of over the counter anti-itch soaps and lotions and by keeping fingernails short.
- Non-aspirin medications, such as acetaminophen, can be used to reduce fever. Aspirin must not be given to young children and adolescents due to the risk of developing Reyes Syndrome, a severe condition resulting from aspirin use for viral infections.

How can chicken pox be prevented?

Chickenpox vaccine is very safe and effective at preventing the disease. If a vaccinated person does get chickenpox, it is usually mild—with fewer blisters and mild or no fever. The chickenpox vaccine prevents almost all cases of severe disease.

If you or your child has not been vaccinated against chickenpox, contact your physician or call (441) 278-6460 the Child Health Immunization Clinic at the Hamilton Health Centre, to be immunized.

If your child cannot be vaccinated and is at high risk of severe complications from chickenpox, please consult your physician for further prevention advice.

People with chickenpox should cover their mouth and nose when sneezing and coughing, dispose of used tissues immediately, wash their hands carefully and not share eating utensils, food or drinking cups.

Adapted from: "Chickenpox" Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022
<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents/diseases/child/varicella.html>
(accessed 09 Feb 2023).