



Chickenpox

Patient and Family Education

What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox (varicella) is usually a mild childhood disease caused by a virus. It is highly contagious (can be caught easily). Anyone who has not had chickenpox may get it. The incubation period (the time between contact with chickenpox and the start of the illness) is between seven and 21 days.

Prevention:

A chickenpox vaccine is now available. Most doctors advise this vaccine for all children who have not had chickenpox. It can be given at any time after 1 year of age.

- Children up to 12 years old need just a single shot.
- Two shots four to eight weeks apart are needed for young people over 12 years and adults who have never had chickenpox.
- It is not useful for children already exposed unless given very soon after the exposure.
- A small number of children get chickenpox after having the vaccine. If this happens, the symptoms are usually very mild.
- For more information, talk with your child's doctor, contact your county's health department office, contact the Centers for Disease Control at 1-800-cdc-info or visit the website at www.cdc.gov.

What are the possible symptoms?

Your child may have one or more of the following symptoms:

- Fever temperature above 100.3°F orally or rectally
- Not feeling well
- Rash of small red bumps that form blisters and then break open, form a crust and are very itchy. The blisters may be found all over the body, including the mouth, ears, genital areas and around the eyes.

What is the treatment?

Your child's doctor will talk with you about specific care for your child. Some general guidelines to follow include:

- Give acetaminophen (Tylenol[®], or less costly store brand) if prescribed by your child's doctor to control fever, aches, or pains. Follow the directions on the box carefully or ask your child's doctor how much medicine to give.
 - Do not give your child more than 5 doses of acetaminophen in a 24-hour period.
 - Do not give acetaminophen to babies less than 3 months of age without a doctor's order
- **DO NOT give aspirin because of the risk of Reyes Syndrome.**
- **DO NOT give your child ibuprofen (Motrin[®], Advil[®], or less costly store brand).**
- Give plenty of clear liquids.
- Offer babies under 12 months old Infalyte[®], Pedialyte[®] or Ricelyte[®] or store brand as advised by your child's doctor.
- Rest.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room right away.

This is general information and is not specific medical advice for your child. Always consult your child's doctor or other healthcare provider if you have any questions or concerns about the care or health of your child. A Children's Healthcare of Atlanta pediatric advice nurse is available 24 hours a day at 404-250-KIDS.

Chickenpox, continued

How do I relieve the itching?

- Giving him frequent lukewarm baths, (you may add baking soda or oatmeal to the bath water)
- Applying calamine lotion to the rash
 - **DO NOT put calamine near the eyes or in the mouth**
 - **DO NOT use creams containing diphenhydramine unless ordered by your child's doctor**
- Giving oral medicines if ordered by your child's doctor

How long is my child contagious?

A child with chickenpox is contagious about two days before the rash appears and until all the sores are crusted over, about seven to 10 days.

A person who has chicken pox can pass it to someone when coughing or sneezing. Tiny droplets from the mouth and nose contain the virus.

What are the complications?

Complications from chickenpox can include skin or other infections and pneumonia. Keep your child from scratching the pox to lessen the risk of infection. Scratching can cause the chickenpox to become infected. You should:

- Keep your child's fingernails cut short.
- Put mittens on the hands of small children.
- Dress him in long-sleeved, lightweight clothing.
- Put cotton gloves or socks on his hands.

When should I call the doctor?

Call your child's doctor if he:

- Is lethargic (does not smile or show interest in playing for at least a few minutes during any four-hour period)
- Took steroids (such as Prellone[®], Prednisone[®], Orapred[®], inhaled steroids for asthma) in the past 21 days and you forgot to tell the doctor who examined your child
- Has infected sores (one that is more red and painful than the others) or is draining foul smelling or yellow-green fluid
- Has sores in or near the eyes
- Has severe headaches
- Has a temperature above 102°F on or after day four, or above 104°F at any time
- Goes eight to 12 hours without urinating
- Has a cough
- Has a sore throat
- Is vomiting
- Is confused with decreased alertness
- Is inconsolable (cannot be calmed for at least a few minutes each hour using methods that usually work for your child, such as holding, rocking, pacifiers or soothing talk)
- Lacks balance or is stumbling within 1 month of having chickenpox

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