



Chickenpox

What is chicken pox?

Chickenpox is a very contagious disease caused by the varicella-zoster virus (VZV). Chickenpox can be serious, especially in babies, adults, and people with weakened immune systems.

How is it spread?

The virus spreads easily from people with chickenpox to others who have never had the disease or received the chickenpox vaccine. The virus spreads in the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It can also be spread by touching or breathing in the virus particles that come from chickenpox blisters.

Chickenpox can also be spread from people with shingles (also caused by the varicella-zoster virus).

For most people, getting chickenpox once provides immunity for life. However, for a few people, they can get chickenpox more than once, although this is not common.

What is the incubation period?

It takes from 10 to 21 days after exposure to a person with chickenpox or shingles for someone to develop chickenpox.

What are the signs and symptoms?

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 face, chest, and back then spread to the rest of the body, including inside the mouth, eyelids, or genital area.

Should a person with chicken pox be isolated?

Exclusion from school/work is required for 5 days from the onset of rash.

What type of treatment and care should be given?

There are several things that can be done at home to help relieve the symptoms and prevent skin infections. Calamine lotion and colloidal oatmeal baths may help relieve some of the itching. Keeping fingernails trimmed short may help prevent skin infections caused by scratching blisters.

Use non-aspirin medications, such as acetaminophen, to relieve fever from chickenpox.

Where can a child receive vaccination against this disease?

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, 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 the varicella-zoster virus, contact your physician or visit the Child Health Immunization Clinic located at the Hamilton Health Centre, 67 Victoria Street, Hamilton, to have be immunized as soon as possible.

Adapted from:
“Chickenpox (Varicella)”. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011 (<http://www.cdc.gov/chickenpox/>, accessed 10 June 2014)