

CHICKEN POX

Chicken pox is an illness caused by a virus called varicella. It is less common since the introduction of the chickenpox vaccine.

WHAT TO EXPECT

- Multiple small, red bumps that progress to blisters (within 24 hours); then to open sores; and finally dry crusts.
- Repeated crops of these sores for 4 to 5 days.
- The sores or crusts are usually less than ¼ inch across.
- Rash is on all body surfaces but usually starts on head and torso.
- Some ulcers (sores) can also normally occur in the mouth, eyelids, and genital area.
- Fever (unless the rash is mild) usually the highest on the third to fourth day.
- Children start to feel better and stop having a fever once they stop getting new bumps. The average child gets a total of about 500 chicken pox. Chicken pox rarely leaves any permanent scars unless the sores become infected or your child repeatedly picks off the scabs. However, normal chicken pox can leave temporary marks on the skin that take 6 to 12 months to fade. One attack usually gives a lifelong immunity. Very rarely, a child may have a second mild attack.

WHEN YOUR CHILD SHOULD BE SEEN BY A MEDICAL PROVIDER

- Take your child to the **emergency room** immediately for: Lethargy, vomiting after the first two days of illness, nervousness, confusion, irritability, convulsions, increased sleepiness, stiff neck, or poor balance (signs of Reye's syndrome or encephalitis)
- Call our office for an appointment if:
 - Age less than one month; (infants who develop chicken pox at less than 48 hours of age are very high risk)
 - Use of oral (prednisone, predlone, decadron, pediaped, oraped) or inhaled steroids in the past month
 - Chronic aspirin use
 - Organ transplant recipient
 - History of cystic fibrosis or diabetes
 - History of AIDS or immune problem
 - Premature infant when today's date is before the predicted due date
 - Fever lasting over four days or unusually high fever (105), or return of fever after 24 hours without fever
 - Severe coughing or difficulty breathing
 - Chicken pox spot ON the surface of the eyeball
 - Earache
 - History of severe eczema
 - Bleeding into the chicken pox sores
 - Area of redness around a pox is greater than the size of a quarter, with or without discharge (bacterial infection)
 - Unusually large tender lymph node

HOME CARE

- Itching- the best treatment for skin discomfort and itching is a cool bath every 3 to 4 hours for the first few days. Aveeno Oatmeal or baking soda is soothing additions to the water. If the itching becomes severe or interferes with sleep, give your child diphenhydramine (Benadryl), loratadine (Claritin), cetirizine (Zyrtec) or fexofenadine (Allegra). Do not use lotions or creams containing diphenhydramine (Benadryl). Do not use cortisone or steroid creams for itch.
- Fever- Acetaminophen (Tylenol) may be given for fever over 102 degrees F (39 degrees C). Aspirin should be avoided with chicken pox because of the link with Reye's syndrome. Do not use ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin).
- Sore mouth- since chicken pox sores also occur in the mouth and throat, your child may be reluctant to eat. Encourage your child to drink cold fluids. Offer a soft, bland diet and avoid salty foods and citrus fruits.
- Sore genital area- sores also normally occur in the genital area. Soothing baths and loose-fitting underwear can help.
- Prevention of infected sores- to prevent the sores from becoming infected with bacteria, trim your child's fingernails short. Also, wash the hands frequently during the day. For young babies who are scratching badly you may want to cover their hands with cotton socks especially at night.

Contagiousness and isolation- Children with chicken pox are contagious from one to two days prior to the rash until all the sores have crusted over, usually about 5 to 7 days after the rash begins. Most children with chicken pox do not require an office visit. To avoid exposing other children, contact us first and we will arrange back door entry if a visit is necessary. Your child does not have to stay home until all the scabs fall off (this may take 2 weeks), but rather until all the blisters have become scabs. Most adults who think they didn't have chicken pox as a child had a mild case. Only 4 percent of adults are not immune. Ninety percent of siblings will come down with chicken pox. The second case in a family usually has many more chicken pox than the first case.

Anti-viral medication called acyclovir is prescribed for some children with chicken pox:

- Children with immune disorders, cancer or certain other chronic illnesses
- Children with chronic steroid or aspirin treatment
- Children who caught chicken pox from a sibling (household contacts generally get a worse case of chicken pox)
- Children with severe eczema

Acyclovir can shorten the course of the illness but is not a quick cure. It must be started in the first 24 hours in order to work. Acyclovir is generally not given to children under one year of age for chicken pox.

Shingles is a re-activation of dormant chicken pox in the body. A child can catch chicken pox from a person with shingles but cannot catch shingles.