

CHICKENPOX

PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

What is Chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a viral infection caused by the varicella zoster virus, a type of herpes virus, and is highly contagious. Most cases occur in children younger than 10 years of age, although persons of any age can become infected.

How is it spread?

- Direct contact with fluid from blisters of an infected person.
- Contact with articles soiled with discharge from blisters or mucous membranes of a person with chickenpox.
- Breathing in droplets projected into the air by an infected person through coughing, sneezing, etc.

How is it treated?

A child's physician can recommend lotion or bathing preparation to relieve itching and acetaminophen to control fever. If given within 96 hours after exposure, varicella zoster immune globulin (VZIG) is effective in preventing or modifying disease. VZIG should be considered for high risk contacts such as immunodeficient persons and newborns of mothers who develop chickenpox within 5 days prior to or 18 hours after delivery. Children should not receive salicylates, such as aspirin, because they increase the risk of developing Reye's syndrome. Keeping finger nails short is also recommended to prevent scratching and possible infection.

How can we prevent Chickenpox?

- Chickenpox vaccine (Varivax) is recommended for children, adolescents, and adults without a reliable history of chickenpox.
- A single dose of vaccine is recommended for children 12 months to 12 years of age.
- Adults and adolescents, 13 years of age and older need a single dose of vaccine followed by a second dose 4 weeks later.

SYMPTOMS OF CHICKENPOX

- First symptoms begin two to three weeks after exposure.
- Range from mild to severe.
- Symptoms include slight fever, flu or cold-like symptoms followed by crops of a pimple-like rash.
- Pimple-like rash progresses to water filled blisters and blisters progress to scabs.
- The rash can be present in all stages and causes itching. The rash is concentrated on the central portion of the body mostly on the trunk and face.
- The rash can also occur on the scalp and mucous membranes.



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