

Chickenpox (Varicella)

1. What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a highly contagious (spreads to other people) disease caused by a virus (germ). The virus causes a rash that starts as small red pimples. These pimples quickly turn into itchy, fluid-filled blisters, which can spread over the entire body.

Chickenpox can be very serious for adults, pregnant women, newborns, and people with a weak immune system. People in these high-risk groups, who have been exposed to chickenpox, should talk to their doctor right away.

2. How do you get chickenpox?

The virus spreads in the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. You can also get chickenpox by having direct contact with an infected person's blisters.

People with chickenpox can spread the disease before the rash appears, as well as days after. It may take up to 21 days to develop a rash after being exposed to an infected person.

3. What are the symptoms of chickenpox?

A common symptom of chickenpox is a rash that turns into itchy, fluid-filled blisters. The blisters will then turn into scabs within 5–7 days. Other symptoms like fever, tiredness, headache, and loss of appetite take place 1–2 days before the rash appears and can continue throughout the illness.

4. How do you treat chickenpox?

Non-aspirin medications, like acetaminophen and ibuprofen are recommended to reduce the fever. Other treatments such as calamine lotion and oatmeal baths may help reduce the itching. It's also recommended to keep fingernails short to prevent skin infections caused by scratching the blisters.

Medications to treat viruses are recommended for people that may be at risk for complications related to chickenpox.

5. How can chickenpox be prevented?

The best way to prevent chickenpox is to get vaccinated. Anyone who hasn't been vaccinated or had the disease, should get two doses of chickenpox vaccine. Children should get their first dose of chickenpox vaccine at 12–15 months of age and a second dose at 4–6 years of age.



Key Points:

- Chickenpox causes itchy, fluid-filled blisters.
- People at risk for complications related to this disease should talk to their doctor right away.
- Vaccination is the best way to prevent getting or spreading chickenpox. Call 2-1-1 (County Info Line) to find a free or low cost provider in your area.

For more information:

Los Angeles County,
Department of Public Health
<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/ip/DiseaseSpecific/Varicella.htm>

Centers for Disease Control and
Prevention (CDC)
<http://www.cdc.gov/chickenpox/>

California Department of Public
Health
<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/Varicella.aspx>