

Protect your Family from Varicella (Chickenpox)

1. What is varicella?

Varicella, also known as chickenpox, is a very contagious disease spread through the air and caused by a virus called *varicella zoster*. It causes a blister-like rash, itching, tiredness, and fever.

2. What are the symptoms?

People with varicella often have symptoms for 5-7 days. Classic symptoms include a rash that turns into itchy, fluid-filled blisters that eventually turn into scabs. Other typical symptoms include:

- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Tiredness
- Headache

3. How does varicella spread?

Chickenpox spreads mainly by touching or breathing in the virus that come from blisters. It may also spread in the air through tiny droplets from infected people after they breathe or talk. The virus spreads easily to those who have never had the disease or been vaccinated. It can spread from 1 to 2 days before the rash develops until all the lesions crust over (usually 4 to 7 days).

4. How serious is varicella?

Serious illnesses from chickenpox can occur. Infants, adolescents, adults, pregnant women, and people with weakened immune systems are high risk for serious illnesses. High risk individuals should immediately consult with their healthcare providers to determine if they need post-exposure medication. Serious complications from chickenpox include:

- Skin Infections
- Pneumonia (a lung infection)
- Dehydration
- Encephalitis (swelling of brain)

Children with chickenpox can miss about a week or more of school or childcare.

5. How can varicella be prevented?

The best way to prevent varicella is to get the chickenpox vaccine. Children over 3 years of age, adolescents, and adults should get two doses of chickenpox vaccine.

Most people who get the vaccine will not get chickenpox. If a vaccinated person does get chickenpox, it is usually mild—with fewer red spots or blisters and mild or no fever.

Home remedies may help relieve symptoms, including calamine lotion and colloidal oatmeal baths. Do not use aspirin products or medications containing salicylate to relieve fever.

If exposed to varicella, avoid getting others sick by staying home until all the blisters are crusted over.



Key Takeaway Messages:

- Chickenpox is a very contagious disease
- Symptoms: Itchy, fluid-filled blisters that eventually turn into scabs
- The best way to prevent disease is to be up-to-date with the chickenpox vaccine.
- Some people vaccinated against chickenpox may still get the disease. However, it is usually milder with fewer blisters and little or no fever.

For More Information:

Want more information on Varicella? Visit

<https://www.cdc.gov/chickenpox/>

Don't have health insurance or a regular doctor? Visit

www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/chs

Or dial 2-1-1 for a list of low or no cost vaccine clinics.

Want more information on vaccine requirements for school entry? Visit

<http://www.shotsforschool.org/>

Want more information?

Call Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Vaccine-Preventable Disease Control Program at (213) 351-7800