



1. What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a very infectious (contagious) disease which causes a red itchy rash and liquid filled blisters all over your body. Chickenpox is caused by a virus called varicella, which is a member of the herpes virus group. Most cases of chickenpox will clear up on its own after about ten days. In rare cases, chickenpox may lead to serious skin infections, pneumonia, brain damage, or death.

2. How do you get chickenpox?

Chickenpox can easily spread by having direct contact with chickenpox blisters. It can also spread from the cough or sneeze of an infected person. A person with chickenpox can spread the disease to others for up to two days before their blisters appear and until the blisters form scabs.

3. How do you know if you have chickenpox?

The most common symptoms of chickenpox include:

- Red itchy rash (these may look like insect bites)
- Small, liquid filled blisters
- Fever
- Stomach pain
- Headache
- Loss of appetite
- Dry cough
- General feeling of discomfort

The rash usually starts on the scalp and body, and then spreads to the face, arms, and legs. The illness usually lasts up to 10 days.

4. How is chickenpox treated?

Most cases of chickenpox are treated with bed rest, fluids, and control of fever. A doctor may give anti-itch medications to relieve the itchiness. Children with chickenpox should NOT take aspirin.

If the illness goes beyond the mild stages, antibiotics or antiviral medications may be prescribed.

5. How can chickenpox be prevented?

The chickenpox vaccine is the best way to prevent chickenpox. The vaccine is recommended for:

- **Young children:** Children receive *two doses* of the varicella vaccine — the first between ages 12 and 15 months and the second between ages 4 and 6 years.
- **Unvaccinated older children:** Children ages 7 to 12 years who haven't been vaccinated should receive *two catch-up doses* of the vaccine, given at least three months apart. Children age 13 or older who haven't been vaccinated should also receive two catch-up doses of the vaccine, given at least four weeks apart.
- **Unvaccinated adults who've never had chickenpox:** This includes health care workers, teachers, child care employees, international travelers, military personnel, adults who live with young children and all women of childbearing age. Pregnant women, and persons who have allergies and/or current medical conditions should talk to their doctor before getting vaccinated.

To find out where to get free shots for adults and children, please call: 1-800-427-8700 or 1-213-351-7800.

6. Can my child get chickenpox after getting one vaccination for chickenpox?

Children who receive only one varicella vaccine *are not* fully protected against chickenpox. If chickenpox is in the community or school, they can get a very mild form of chickenpox that is still contagious to others.

Sources

1. *Chickenpox*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/>
2. *Chickenpox*. L.A. County Department of Public Health. <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/acd/Diseases/Varicella.htm>
<http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/ip>
3. *Chickenpox*. The Mayo Clinic. <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/chickenpox/DS00053>

For additional resources, please visit the L.A. County Department of Public Health website <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov>.