



Chickenpox

What is it?

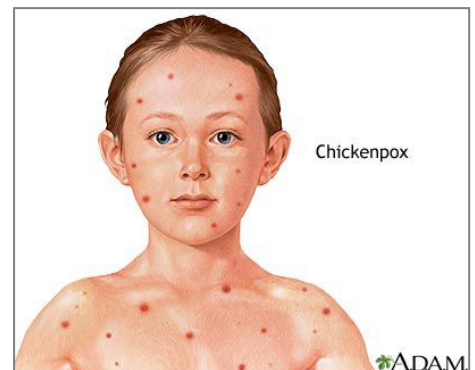
Chickenpox is a viral infection caused by the varicella zoster virus. It spreads in droplets inhaled into the respiratory tract. Complications are rare, but serious, and can occur in previously healthy children.

Who's affected?

Chickenpox tends to affect children under ten - most children have had the infection by this age. In older children and adults, chickenpox can be more severe. It spreads very easily from one child to another. Children who are immunosuppressed (for example, taking steroids) are particularly vulnerable to complications, as are newborn babies who may catch the infection from their mother in late pregnancy.

What are the symptoms?

The incubation period (from exposure to onset of symptoms) is 14 to 24 days. The initial symptoms are mild fever and headaches - younger children may seem generally grouchy. These are followed within hours by the appearance of a typical rash. Crops of red spots appear which quickly develop central fluid-filled blisters that are intensely itchy.



After a couple of days these scab over and dry up. The rash mostly affects the trunk, but may be anywhere on the body, including the scalp and in the mouth. In about one in ten cases symptoms are so minimal the infection goes unnoticed.

The most common complication is a secondary skin infection. A persistently high fever or return of fever should raise suspicions. Other complications include pneumonia, encephalitis and inflammation of the blood vessels (vasculitis).

What's the treatment?

Talk to your doctor if you're unsure of the diagnosis or if your child seems particularly unwell, has a cough, headache, if the skin is particularly inflamed or infected, or there are other worrying symptoms. For young babies or children with immunity problems, always seek medical advice.

You can give pain-relieving syrup and plenty of fluids. Calamine lotion and antihistamine medicines may also help to relieve the itching. Keep your child's hands clean, their fingernails short and try to encourage them not to scratch the spots, as they can scar. The spots may be infectious until they've fully scabbed over, and child need to be excluded from school for at least seven days or until the lesions are crusted and dried and the child no longer has a fever.



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Vaccination

The chickenpox vaccine is very safe. It can help prevent most cases of chickenpox, or make it less severe if contracted. Children who have never had chickenpox should be vaccinated twice: 1st dose at 12-15 months of age and a second one at 4-6 years of age. The vaccination is available at Family Medical Practice.

Further help

Most children recover without long-term problems. But children at high risk who are exposed to chickenpox must be treated with immunoglobulin injections to prevent the infection, or antiviral drugs to treat it. There is also a vaccine that can be given to prevent chickenpox. If you require any further information do not hesitate to contact your Pediatrician.

Pediatric Team

Family Medical Practice HCMC