**Chickenpox (Varicella) Fact Sheet**

**What is chickenpox and what causes it?**

Chickenpox is a highly contagious disease caused by the varicella-zoster virus (VZV). It can cause an itchy, blister-like rash among other symptoms. The rash first appears on the chest, back, and face, and then spreads over the entire body.

**What are the symptoms of chickenpox?**

Symptoms of chickenpox usually begin 10-21 days (but usually 14-16 days and up to 28 days) after a person has come in contact with the virus and typically last about 4 to 7 days. The classic symptom is a rash that turns into itchy, fluid-filled blisters that eventually turn into scabs. The rash may first show up on the chest, back, and face, and then spreads over the entire body. It usually takes about 1 week for all of the blisters to scab. Symptoms that may begin to appear one to two days before rash include: fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, headache. Some people vaccinated against chickenpox can still get the disease. However, they usually have milder symptoms with fewer or no blisters, a mild or no fever, and are sick for a shorter period of time than those unvaccinated.

**How does chickenpox spread?**

Chickenpox spreads through direct contact with or aerosolization of fluid in the rash lesions, or through respiratory droplets from an infectious person. Typically, spread occurs through close contact with an infectious person, such as direct physical or face-to-face contact, or one or more hours of indoor contact (e.g. in the same room). Transitory contact would not constitute an exposure. Chickenpox is considered contagious beginning 1 to 2 days before rash onset until all the lesions have crusted (scabbed). Vaccinated people who get chickenpox may develop lesions that do not crust; they are considered contagious until no new lesions have appeared for 24 hours.

**How is chickenpox treated?**

Home treatments to help relieve symptoms and prevent skin infections: Calamine lotion and a cool bath with added baking soda, uncooked oatmeal, or colloidal oatmeal may help relieve some of the itching. Keep fingernails trimmed short and minimize scratching to prevent the virus from spreading to others and to help prevent skin infections. If you do scratch a blister by accident, [wash your hands](https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

Do not use aspirin or aspirin-containing products to relieve fever from chickenpox. The use of aspirin in children with chickenpox has been associated with Reye’s syndrome, a severe disease that affects the liver and brain and can cause death. Instead, use non-aspirin medications, such as acetaminophen, to relieve fever from chickenpox.

Antiviral medications are recommended for people with chickenpox that are more likely to develop serious illness and works best if it is given as early as possible, preferably within the first 24 hours after the rash starts.

**How can you prevent the spread of chickenpox?**

The best way to prevent chickenpox is to get the chickenpox vaccine. The vaccine prevents almost all cases of severe illness. Additional steps to prevent the spread of disease may include:

• Avoiding close contact with others who are coughing or ill

• Washing hands often

• Covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or cough and sneeze into your sleeve

• Stay at home if ill

• Seek medical attention if chickenpox-like symptoms develop