

Chickenpox

What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is caused by a virus, called varicella-zoster. It can be passed from person to person (contagious). Before your child gets the rash, they may have a fever, muscles aches, poor appetite and feel tired. Then, chickenpox causes a rash that normally starts on the stomach and chest area. It may spread over the whole body. The rash starts as flat, red spots that quickly become raised water-filled bumps called vesicles. After 5 to 7 days, the bumps will become scabs. The rash is **very** itchy. Scratching may cause them to get infected. Scratching the bumps or picking off the scabs will cause permanent scars.



Chickenpox is contagious from about 2 to 3 days **before** your child breaks out in a rash. They are still contagious until the rash bumps are all scabbed over. This takes about 7 to 10 days after the spots first appear. This means your child is contagious before anyone knows they have chickenpox! This could cause other children to catch chickenpox if in the same room with your child. Keep your child away from newborn infants and other children until all bumps have scabs. If the chickenpox does get passed to others, their bumps will appear about 10 to 21 days after your child's bumps appeared.

Chicken pox can be spread by:

- Breathing the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes.
- Directly touching:
 - The rash on an infected person.
 - A person who has shingles. Shingles is an illness caused by the chickenpox virus. It can occur many years after the original infection. It affects adolescents and adults who have had chickenpox.

How is it treated?

During the first few days, your child may feel fine. Most often they will have a fever and look or act sick. The chickenpox rash is very itchy. Here are things that you can do to make your child more comfortable at home.

- Try to have your child drink clear liquids each day. Try white soda, Kool-Aid®, Gatorade®, apple juice, Popsicles®, Jell-O® and water.
- Your child may not feel like eating. This is okay, as long as they drink a lot of liquids.
- Give acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Motrin®, Advil®) for a fever.
 - Do not give ibuprofen to infants under 6 months old.
 - Do not give aspirin to your child. Aspirin may cause Reye Syndrome, a rare but serious illness. Always talk to the doctor, nurse or pharmacist before giving your child any medicine.

- Diphenhydramine (Benadryl Elixir®) is an over-the-counter medicine. It can be given by mouth for itching. Ask your doctor or nurse how much to give your child.
- Give a warm (not hot) bath. Use a ½ cup of cornstarch, baking soda or oatmeal for every two inches of bathtub water. You may also use Aveeno Bath® as directed. Clean the tub well after the bath to remove the oily film that may be slippery.
- Everyone at home should wash their hands with soap and warm water often to stop the spread of germs.
- Try to keep your child from scratching the bumps. Scratching can cause infection.
 - Keep your child's fingernails trimmed.
 - A pair of socks or mittens on the hands may help.
 - Try using Zyrtec® (cetirizine) for itching.
 - If the itching is severe, a medicine may be prescribed to help decrease the itching.
- Keep your child home from school and daycare until all of the spots have crusted over.

Special Information

- If you think your child has chickenpox, call your child's doctor. If your child is going to be seen, the doctor's office should take special measures so that your child does not expose other patients.
- If your child is taking any steroids, tell your child's health care provider. This includes inhalers and medicines taken by mouth.
- There is a vaccine that will help prevent chickenpox:
 - It is recommended for children starting at 12 months old. The vaccine requires 2 doses.
 - Once your child is exposed to the virus and has the rash, a vaccine will not help.
- If your child has not had the vaccine and gets exposed to someone with chickenpox or shingle, call your child's doctor right away. If they get the vaccine within 72 hours, it may prevent chickenpox.

ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has:

- A change in behavior such as getting crabby or more tired.
- Scabs that look infected. Signs of infection include more redness, soreness or pus around the area of the spots.
- A rash near the eyes.
- A temperature of 101.5° (38.3° C) or higher that lasts 3 days or more.
- A fever that goes away but comes back again.
- A seizure caused by a fever that changes quickly.
- A different looking rash while they have the chickenpox rash.
- Special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.