

Chickenpox (Varicella)

What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is an infectious disease caused by a virus in the herpes family. Most cases are in people under 15 years of age but adults may get chickenpox too.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of chickenpox are generally a blister-like rash, fever, tiredness, and itching. The rash often appears on the face and trunk first and spreads to the rest of the body. Symptoms in children generally last 5-10 days.

Although rare, chickenpox can cause serious illness or complications such as bacterial skin infections, pneumonia, or encephalitis. This is especially true in adults, infants, and those with weak immune symptoms. Complications from chickenpox can result in death.

How is chickenpox transmitted?

Chickenpox is highly contagious and is spread by person-to-person direct contact or through the air by an infected person coughing or sneezing. A person is contagious 1-2 days before the rash appears and until all blisters have formed scabs. It can take 10-21 days for a person to develop chickenpox after being exposed to an infected person.

How is chickenpox treated?

Some of the home treatments for chickenpox include calamine lotion and oatmeal baths to relieve itching. It is recommended that nails be trimmed short as scratching blisters may lead to infection. Do not use aspirin or aspirin-containing products to relieve a child's fever. Using aspirin has been associated with the development of Reye syndrome (a severe disease affecting all organs, but most seriously affecting the liver and brain, that may cause death).

Exclusion from school/work until the lesions dry up is important to prevent spread.

Can chickenpox be prevented?

There is a vaccine for chickenpox. Individuals who have never had chicken pox and are greater than 13 years of age would receive 2 doses of vaccine. Children younger than this who have never had chicken pox would receive one dose.

For more information, contact your health care provider, the Broward County Health Department at 954-847-3567, or visit the websites below. This fact sheet is for informational purposes only and is not intended for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider.

www.cdc.gov
www.browardchd.org

Information provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention