

CHICKENPOX

What is Chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a very contagious disease caused by the Varicella-Zoster virus (VZV). Chickenpox is a common illness among kids, particularly those under age 12. An itchy rash of spots that look like blisters can appear all over the body and may be accompanied by flu-like symptoms.

Symptoms of Chickenpox

Chickenpox causes a red, itchy rash on the skin that usually appears first on the abdomen or back and face, and then spreads to almost everywhere else on the body.

The rash begins as multiple small, red bumps that look like pimples or insect bites. They develop into thin-walled blisters filled with clear fluid, which becomes cloudy. The blister wall breaks, leaving open sores, which finally crust over to become dry, brown scabs. It usually takes about one week for all the blisters to become scabs.

Some kids have high fever, tiredness, loss of appetite or headache 24-48 hours before the rash appears. These symptoms may last for a few days. The fever stays in the range of 100°–102°, though in rare cases may be higher.

Younger kids often have milder symptoms and fewer blisters than older children or adults.

How do people get Chickenpox?

Chickenpox spreads from person to person by direct contact or through the air by coughing or sneezing. It is highly contagious. It can also be spread through direct contact with the fluid from a blister or a person infected, or from direct contact with a sore from a person with shingles. A person with Chickenpox can spread the disease from 1 to 2 days before they get the rash until all their Chickenpox blisters have formed scabs.

Diagnosis and Treatment of Chickenpox

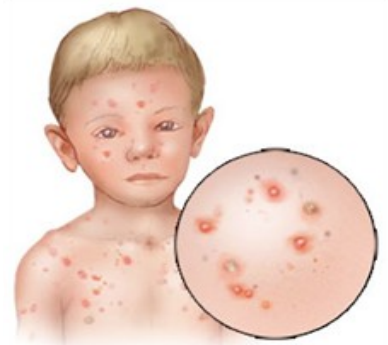
The diagnosis of Chickenpox is primarily clinical. In a non-immunized individual with typical symptoms associated with the appropriate appearing rash occurring in "crops", no further investigation would normally be undertaken.

A virus causes Chickenpox, so the doctor won't prescribe antibiotics. However, antibiotics may be required if the sores become infected by bacteria. This is common among kids because they often scratch and pick at the blisters.

How Can I Help Prevent the Spread of Chickenpox?

The Chickenpox (Varicella) vaccine is the best way to prevent chickenpox. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that the vaccine provides complete protection from the virus for nearly 90% of young children who receive it.

While the vaccine doesn't provide complete protection, it significantly lessens the severity of the disease. Those infected with Chickenpox should remain home and avoid exposing others who are susceptible.



For more information, contact a Public Health Nurse at the City-County Health Department at 454-6950 or visit www.cchdmt.org or www.cdc.gov