

Chicken pox (Varicella)

Chicken pox is a mild but very common childhood illness that most children will catch at some point; it is most common in children under the age of ten.

If you have chicken pox you are most infectious from one to two days before the rash starts, until all the blisters have crusted over (Usually five to six days after the start of the rash).

Chicken pox causes red itchy spots that turn into fluid filled blisters. These blisters crust over to form scabs and then drop off.

Some children only have a few spots, but in others they can cover the entire body. Spots are most likely to appear on the face, ears, scalp, under the arms, on the chest, stomach and on the arms and legs.

The chicken pox virus is spread in the same way as colds and flu.

- The virus is contained in the millions of tiny droplets that come out of the nose and mouth when an infected person coughs or sneezes.
- You can also become infected by handling a surface or object that these droplets have landed on, you then transfer the virus to yourself by touching your face.

Symptoms may include:

- Red itchy spots
- A fever for the first few days of the illness.
- Irritability due to the itching.
- Aching, painful muscles
- Headache
- Loss of appetite.
- Complications of chicken pox are rare in healthy children; the most common one is when the blisters become infected.
- The people who are most at risk of developing chicken pox complications are adults, pregnant women, babies under four weeks old and people with weakened immune system.



Treatment

- There is no specific treatment for chicken pox. The virus usually clears up by itself without any treatment.
- You can ease the symptoms by taking Paracetamol to reduce the fever and/or muscle pains and headache.
- Ensure that your child drinks plenty of fluids to remain hydrated.
- It is important not to scratch the spots to avoid scarring; you can keep the finger nails short, use calamine lotion or a cooling gel to soothe the skin.
- For severe itching your doctor may prescribe anti-histamine.
- Keep your child cool, dress them in loose fitting clothing so the skin is not further aggravated.

Prevention

- Good hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette is the most important and effective way of preventing spread of the infection.

If your child has chicken pox, inform the school and keep them at home while they are infectious, which is until the last blister has burst and crusted over. This usually takes 5- 6 days after the rash begins.

For further information and advice please contact the Nursing Team.