

What is Chickenpox

Chickenpox is a highly contagious disease caused by the varicella-zoster virus (VZV). It can cause an itchy, blister-like rash. The rash first appears on the chest, back, and face, and then spreads over the entire body, causing between 250 and 500 itchy blisters. Chickenpox can be serious, especially in babies, adolescents, adults, pregnant women, and people with a weakened immune system. The best way to prevent chickenpox is to get the chickenpox vaccine.

How is it treated

There are several things that you can do at home to help relieve chickenpox 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.
- Minimize scratching to prevent the virus from spreading to others and potential bacterial infection from occurring,
- Keeping fingernails trimmed short may help prevent skin infections caused by scratching blisters

Do not use aspirin or aspirin-containing products to relieve fever from chickenpox. Instead, use non-aspirin medications, such as acetaminophen, to relieve fever from chickenpox. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends avoiding treatment with ibuprofen if possible because it has been associated with life-threatening bacterial skin infections.

When do I see my doctor?

For people exposed to chickenpox, call your healthcare provider if the person:

- Has never had chickenpox and is not vaccinated with the chickenpox vaccine
- Is pregnant

→ **Has a weakened immune system caused by disease or medication; for example:**

- A person with HIV/AIDS or cancer
- A person who has had a transplant
- A person on chemotherapy, immunosuppressive medications, or long-term use of steroids

→ **The person is at risk of serious complications because he or she:**

- Is less than 1 year old
- Is older than 12 years of age
- Has a weakened immune system
- Is pregnant

→ **The person develops any of the following symptoms:**

- Fever that lasts longer than 4 days
- Fever that rises above 102°F (38.9°C)
- Any areas of the rash or any part of the body becomes very red, warm or tender, or begins leaking pus (thick, discolored fluid), as these symptoms may indicate a bacterial infection
- Difficult waking up or confused behavior
- Difficulty walking
- Stiff neck
- Frequent vomiting
- Difficulty breathing
- Severe cough
- Severe abdominal pain
- Rash with bleeding or bruising (hemorrhagic rash)

How do you get Chickenpox

The virus spreads easily from people with chickenpox to others who have never had the disease or never been vaccinated.

The virus spreads mainly through close contact with someone who has chickenpox.

The varicella-zoster virus also causes shingles. Chickenpox can be spread from people with shingles to others who have never had chickenpox or have not received the chickenpox vaccine. This can happen through close contact with someone who has shingles.

A person with chickenpox is contagious beginning 1 to 2 days before rash onset until all the chickenpox lesions have crusted (scabbed). Vaccinated people who get chickenpox may develop lesions that do not crust.

These people are considered contagious until no new lesions have appeared for 24 hours.

It takes about 2 weeks (from 10 to 21 days) after exposure to a person with chickenpox or shingles for someone to develop chickenpox.

If a vaccinated person gets the disease, they can still spread it to others. For most people, getting chickenpox once provides immunity for life. However, for a few people, it is possible to get chickenpox more than once; although, this is not common.

How do I prevent it?

The best way to prevent chickenpox is to **get the chickenpox vaccine**. Everyone – including children, adolescents, and adults – should get two doses of chickenpox vaccine if they have never had chickenpox or were never vaccinated.

Chickenpox vaccine is very safe and effective at preventing the disease. Most people who get the vaccine will not get chickenpox. If a vaccinated person does get chickenpox, the symptoms are usually milder with fewer or no blisters (they may have just red spots) and mild or no fever.

Three phases of Chickenpox Rash



Red or Pinkish Bumps



Fluid-filled Blisters/ Vesicles



Crusts & Scabbed Lesions



Varicella Vaccine: Minimum age for 1st dose - 12 months. The 2nd dose may be administered before age 4 at least 3 months have elapsed since the first dose.



HSA
Public Health
Health Services Authority

345 244 2889

George Town 244 2648

West Bay 949 3439

Eastern Districts 947 2299

Faith Hospital 948 2242



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What you need to know



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