

Chickenpox (Varicella) Disease

What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox, or varicella, is a very common childhood infection that can also affect adults. It is caused by the varicella-zoster virus, which only infects humans.

What are the symptoms of chickenpox?

Children with chickenpox may get a fever, a mild headache, feel tired, and have muscle or joint aches. They will get an itchy rash that appears as raised red bumps. These spots will turn in to blisters that burst, and then scab over. The rash usually lasts about 4 to 5 days.

How does chickenpox spread?

Chickenpox is extremely contagious. It is spread through the air when a person with chickenpox coughs or sneezes, as well as through contact with fluid from chickenpox blisters.

When can my infected child spread chickenpox?

Chickenpox is contagious 2 days prior to getting a rash (usually before a person is aware they have an infection), until all spots are scabbed over.

Can my child go to school with chickenpox?

As long as your child is feeling well enough to participate in activities at school, they may return to school. Transmission of chickenpox is highest before the rash is visible, so keeping children home once the rash has started has not been shown to prevent spread.

How do I protect my child from chickenpox?

The best way to protect your child from chickenpox is to get two doses of the chickenpox vaccine.

If your child has been in contact with someone who has chickenpox disease, getting a dose of vaccine (if they have not had the vaccine before) within 3-5 days of contact has been shown to reduce severity of the disease.



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But my child already had one shot of the chickenpox vaccine...

Although not as common, there have been breakthrough cases of chickenpox disease in children who have only had one dose of the vaccine. These cases are usually only very mild. For this reason, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has now implemented a mandatory second dose of vaccine, starting for children in junior kindergarten this year. Your child is eligible for a free chickenpox vaccine if your child:

- Has had one dose of chickenpox vaccine;
- Has not yet had chickenpox disease; and,
- Is born in the year 2000 or later.

Chickenpox vaccines are available through the health unit – call to make an appointment.

What do I need to know as a parent of a kindergarten student?

If your child attending school was born in 2010 or later you will need to provide the Northwestern Health Unit with:

- Recorded proof your child has received two doses of chickenpox vaccine; or
- Blood test proving immunity; or
- A note from their doctor stating that they have had chickenpox disease.

What can I do for my child if they have chickenpox?

Putting calamine lotion on the rash, or having a cool bath helps to relieve the itch. Tylenol or Advil can help with fever or muscle aches. Do not give ASA products (like Aspirin).

When should I seek medical attention?

Chickenpox can lead to more serious infections such as bacterial skin infections, pneumonia, and infections of the brain. If you experience severe symptoms, or have a fever lasting longer than 4 days, contact a doctor.

Note: It is highly recommended that people who have a weakened immune system (immunocompromised) or women who plan on becoming pregnant (who have not had chickenpox before) get two doses of the vaccine.

For more information, or to book an appointment please contact your local Northwestern Health Unit office.



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