

What is chicken pox?

- Chicken pox is a viral infection.
- The infection is sometimes called chicken pox because it causes the skin to break out in red spots. The spots remind some people of chickpeas.

What causes chicken pox?

- Chicken pox is caused by the Varicella-Zoster virus (VZV).

Who can get chicken pox?

- Chicken pox is most commonly found in children between 5 and 9 years old.
- Chicken pox is most common in the late winter and early spring.

What are the symptoms of chicken pox?

- Chicken pox causes an itchy red rash on the skin.
- The rash often has blisters. It can be described as a "dew-drop on a rose petal."
- The rash usually begins on the trunk and face, then spreads to the rest of the body. It can spread to the scalp, penis, and inside the mouth, nose, and vagina.
- Scratching can cause the blisters to break. Scabs may form.
- Children may have a fever, stomach pain, and feel sick.
- Children may have little appetite and less energy than usual.

How can chicken pox be prevented?

- A chicken pox vaccine is available in the United States. The vaccine helps protect the body against the chicken pox virus.
- Those who get chicken pox after being vaccinated usually have milder symptoms and fewer blisters.
- The vaccine is given by shot when children are 1 year old or older. If a young child has not gotten the vaccine, it should be given before they are 13 years old.

Is chicken pox contagious?

- Yes. Chicken pox is very contagious.
- Chicken pox can be spread through coughing, sneezing, and close contact.
- It is contagious until all of the blisters on the skin are scabbed over.
- Symptoms will usually show up between 14 to 17 days after contact with the virus. If a child in a family breaks out in chicken pox, brothers and sisters will probably begin having symptoms 2 weeks later.
- Certain people should not come into contact with chicken pox:
 - pregnant women who have not had chicken pox
 - small babies
 - people with cancer
 - people with AIDS
 - people with weak immune systems
 - people on steroids
- People who have already had chicken pox become immune to virus that causes chicken pox. They will not get it a second time.
- People who are not immune to chicken pox who come into contact with the virus will almost always get chicken pox.

How is chicken pox treated?

- Children over 12 years old who have chicken pox should see the doctor.
- Children who have chicken pox and chronic health problems should see the doctor.
- Other children do not need to see the doctor unless there are complications. Treatment can be given at home to help ease itching, pain, and fever.

Itching, pain, and fever

- Give your child a bath in cool or lukewarm water every 3-4 hours. Oatmeal baths (such as Aveeno) will also help. Pat the skin dry. Do not rub.
- Press a wet towel or pad to your child's skin.
- Applying calamine lotion to itchy areas may help. Do not put lotion near the eyes or on the faces of young children.
- Trim your child's fingernails so scratching won't break blisters. Put mittens or socks on infants' hands at bedtime.
- Touching ice cubes to the skin may ease itching.
- Chicken pox in the mouth can make it painful to eat or drink. Give clear, cold fluids and soft, bland food (such as applesauce or soup). Avoid acidic juices (such as orange juice) and salty food.
- Use acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or other nonaspirin medications to ease mouth pain and reduce fever.
- Some doctors also recommend diphenhydramine (such as Benadryl). Check with your doctor for the proper dose.
- **Do not use Caladryl lotion to treat chicken pox.** It contains diphenhydramine and can cause an overdose.
- Do not use aspirin to treat symptoms.

How long does chicken pox last?

- Chicken pox usually lasts 7-10 days in children. Adults may be sick longer.
- Children can return to school or daycare after about 1 week. All of the blisters should be scabbed before they go back. The scabs do not have to fall off.
- Dark spots from chicken pox will usually fade in 6-12 months.

When should I call the doctor?

Call the doctor if...

- you have questions or concerns about your child's illness or treatment.
- your child has chronic health problems or is over 12 years old.
- your child has a lasting fever, a fever above 103 degrees F (or 39.4 degrees C), or a fever that returns after the 3rd or 4th day of illness.
- your child has a bad headache, it hurts her to look at lights, or she is drowsy and hard to wake up.
- your child's neck is stiff or it is hard for her to walk.
- your child has trouble breathing.
- blisters are swollen, red, painful, or leaking pus. Blisters like this may be infected.
- your child has blisters in her eyes or vision changes.
- your child has vomited many times.
- your child has chicken pox and someone in your house should not come into contact with her (see list above).

Quick Answers

- Chicken pox is a viral infection.
- Chicken pox is caused by the Varicella-Zoster virus (VZV).

- Chicken pox is most commonly found in children between 5 and 9 years old.
- Chicken pox causes an itchy red rash on the skin. The rash often turns into blisters.
- A vaccine is available that helps protect the body against the virus that causes chicken pox.
- Chicken pox is contagious until all of the blisters on the skin are scabbed over.
- Children with chicken pox do not need to see the doctor. Treatment can be given at home to ease symptoms.
- Children can return to school or daycare after about 1 week.
- Call the doctor if you have questions or concerns about your child's illness or treatment.

References

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