



Chicken Pox (Varicella) Questions and Answers

What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox, also known as varicella, is a contagious, rash illness caused by the varicella zoster virus (VZV).

What are the symptoms of chickenpox?

In children, the first sign is often a rash. In adults, fever and fatigue may set in one to two days before the rash. The rash appears as red-raised spots that turn into itchy, fluid filled blisters. Fluid may drain from the blisters before they dry and crust. The blisters may last for 3-7 days before scabbing and crusting over, and there may be two to four successive “crops,” or waves, of blisters that appear during the course of the illness.

Who gets chickenpox?

Anyone who has never had the disease or has not received the chickenpox vaccine can get chickenpox. Chickenpox is commonly diagnosed in young children, although teens and adults can get the disease also.

Chickenpox can occur in vaccinated persons. These persons usually have mild symptoms for a shorter amount of time, with fewer than 50 blisters (that rarely contain fluid), and low or no fever.

How is chickenpox spread?

Chickenpox is spread both through the air (by coughing and sneezing), and by direct contact with mucus, saliva, or fluid from blisters. Chickenpox may also be spread by contact with articles (i.e. clothing) that have been soiled by fluid from the rash.

When and for how long is a person contagious?

- A person is contagious from one to two days before the rash appears until all blisters have formed scabs. This usually occurs four to seven days after the rash develops.

- Vaccinated individuals who develop chickenpox are also considered contagious and can spread the virus until all lesions have faded or no new lesions have developed within a 24-hour period.

If a person is exposed to chickenpox, when might a rash appear?

The time period between exposure and the onset of illness is usually about 2 weeks, but can range from 10 to 21 days.

Isn't chickenpox a mild disease?

Most healthy children and adults recover from chickenpox without additional health problems; however, the disease can be severe and may cause serious complications in some circumstances. Before vaccine was available, 11,000 people were hospitalized nationally each year. Possible complications of chickenpox include:

- Infections of the skin and soft tissue
- Dehydration
- Pneumonia
- Encephalitis (inflammation of the brain)
- Fetal complications

My child has been exposed to chickenpox. What should I do?

Contact your doctor immediately if you think your child has been exposed to chickenpox, especially if they have not been vaccinated, never had chickenpox or are younger than one year old.

**Is there a treatment for chickenpox?
Healthcare providers may prescribe an
antiviral medication to individuals at risk
for more serious disease.**



Have questions?

Talk with your Doctor.

<http://health.state.ga.us/epi/vpd/varicella.asp>



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If your child is unvaccinated, getting the vaccine after a recent exposure may still prevent disease or modify the severity of the disease, if received within 3 days and up to 5 days after the exposure. If your child is immuno-compromised, then consult with your doctor immediately as treatment may be recommended.

Is it okay to take my child to public places if they have chickenpox?

If your child currently has chickenpox, they should avoid public places (e.g. daycare, playground, church, grocery store) until the disease has resolved and all the lesions have crusted over. **Any contact with infants, unvaccinated children, pregnant women, and immuno-compromised persons should be avoided.** Individuals with chickenpox need to stay home until the rash blisters are dried and crusted. This is usually 4-7 days after the rash began, but may be longer.

Vaccinated individuals who develop chickenpox may not have fluid-filled blisters that dry and crust. In this situation, the individual should stay home until all spots have faded or no new spots have developed within a 24-hour period, whichever is later.

Is there a vaccine for chickenpox?

Yes. Chickenpox vaccine is recommended for all young children and for any adolescent and adult who has never had varicella disease nor been vaccinated. Two doses of vaccine are required for all children entering school who have never had disease unless they have an approved religious exemption or a valid medical exemption from their doctor because of their health status.

- Children should get their first dose at 12-15 months and the second dose at age 4 to 6 years.
- Children up to age 13 years should receive a total of two doses given at least 3 months apart.
- Adolescents age 13 years and older and adults who have never had chickenpox or have never been vaccinated should get two doses, 4 to 8 weeks apart.

During an outbreak, the Department of Public Health (DPH) will recommend vaccination for individuals who have not received two doses of varicella vaccine and who have no documented history of varicella disease. DPH may also recommend school exclusion of susceptible individuals in certain situations.

Why do some people still get chickenpox after being vaccinated?

Two doses of varicella vaccine show to be 88%-98% effective at preventing disease compared to 85% effectiveness after just one dose. Vaccine recipients may occasionally experience chickenpox afterward, even though the vaccine was meant to protect them from it. The chance of this happening is small and the result is usually a much milder illness. Like with any vaccination, some mild reactions, such as fever or pain/soreness at the injection site may occur. In the majority of cases, the vaccine is effective at preventing chickenpox and causes no side effects. If you or your child experiences a severe adverse reaction after receiving the vaccine, then you should consult your health care provider immediately.



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