

Chickenpox *Fact Sheet*



What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a contagious rash illness caused by the varicella-zoster virus (VZV).

Symptoms

Symptoms may take 10-21 days to develop after an exposure. 1-2 days before the rash appears, initial symptoms may include:

- **Fever**
- **Tiredness**
- **Loss of appetite**
- **Headache**
- The classic symptom is a **rash** that turns into **itchy, fluid-filled blisters**
- The rash may first appear on the chest, back, or face before spreading. The Rash may be present on mouth and eyelids

Prevention

Know your immunity—through vaccine records, previous illness, or a blood test. **Chickenpox can be prevented with the varicella vaccine.** Two doses of the vaccine are about 90% effective at preventing chickenpox. **Talk to your doctor about vaccination.**

How is it spread?

The virus is spread by close contact, respiratory droplets, and by the vesicular fluid from a person with chickenpox. **A person with chickenpox is contagious from 1-2 days before the rash appears until all the blisters have formed scabs.** VZV also causes shingles (reactivated VZV). A person with shingles can spread chickenpox to a person with no prior immunity (from chickenpox disease or vaccination).

Treatment

Calamine lotion and colloidal oatmeal baths may help decrease itching. Antiviral medications may be prescribed. **Use non-aspirin medications to treat fever in children.** Complications are rare, but can occur. Serious cases can lead to skin infections, pneumonia, or brain swelling. **If you are exposed to chickenpox:** call your doctor as soon as possible to discuss immunity and eligibility for treatment.

