

## Fact Sheet

# Chickenpox

Also Known As: Varicella



## What is Chickenpox?

Chickenpox is an acute contagious viral disease. It is caused by the varicella-zoster virus (VZV). Chickenpox is highly contagious to people who haven't had the disease or been vaccinated against it.

## Spread of Disease

The virus spreads in the air when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks. It can also be spread by touching or breathing in the virus particles that come from chickenpox blisters.

Chickenpox can also be spread from people with shingles to others who have never had chickenpox or the chickenpox vaccine. This can happen if a person touches or breathes in virus from shingles blisters.

A person with chickenpox can spread the disease from 1 to 2 days before they get the rash until all their chickenpox blisters have formed scabs (usually 5-7 days)

It takes from 10 to 21 days after exposure to a person with chickenpox or shingles for someone to develop chickenpox.

If a person vaccinated for chickenpox 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, they can get chickenpox more than once, although this is not common.

## Signs and Symptoms

The classic symptom of chickenpox is a rash that turns into itchy, fluid-filled blisters that eventually turn into scabs. The rash may first show up on the face, chest, and back then spread to the rest of the body, including inside the mouth, eyelids, or genital area. It usually takes about one week for all the blisters to become scabs.

Vaccinated people who contract the disease recover quicker and often have very mild symptoms such as fewer blisters and mild or no fever.

**Other typical symptoms that may begin to appear 1-2 days before the rash include:**

- § Fever
- § Tiredness
- § Loss of appetite
- § Headache

## Treatment and Complications

There are several things that can be done at home to help relieve the symptoms and prevent skin infections. Calamine lotion and colloidal oatmeal baths may help relieve some of the itching. Keeping fingernails trimmed short may help prevent skin infections caused by scratching blisters.

Use only non-aspirin medications, such as acetaminophen, to relieve fever from chickenpox.

The use of aspirin in children with chickenpox has been associated with Reye's syndrome, a severe disease that affects the liver and brain and can cause death.

People who may have more severe symptoms and may be at high risk for complications include Infants, adolescents, adults, pregnant women, or people with weakened immune systems.

**Call your healthcare provider if the person develops:**

- § Fever that last longer than 4 days
- § Fever that rises above 102 degrees F (38.9 degrees C)
- § Any areas of the rash or any part of the body that becomes very red, warm, tender, or begins leaking pus
- § Extreme illness
- § Confused demeanor or difficulty waking up
- § Difficulty walking
- § Stiff neck
- § Frequent vomiting
- § Difficulty breathing
- § Severe cough
- § Severe abdominal pain
- § Rash with bleeding or bruising

**Prevention**



The best way to prevent chickenpox is to get the chickenpox vaccine. Children, adolescents, and adults should have two doses of chickenpox vaccine.

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, it is usually mild—with fewer blisters and mild or no fever. The chickenpox vaccine prevents almost all cases of severe disease.



***For more sources of information on this topic visit:***

ST. CLAIR COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT [www.scchealth.co](http://www.scchealth.co)

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)