

Chicken Pox

What is chicken pox? It is a common illness that usually lasts five to seven days with:

Mild fever

Itchy skin rash, which:

- Starts as small red spots that blister and scab over
- Can be anywhere on the body and scalp

Although chicken pox is usually a mild illness, it can be dangerous for:

- *Pregnant women because it can cause birth defects or severe illness in the baby.*
- *Newborns, teens, adults, and people with immune problems (e.g., HIV/AIDS, chemotherapy, organ transplant, steroid medications).*

How does chicken pox spread? It is very contagious and spreads by:

- Being in a room together, coughing, and sneezing
- Sharing food, eating utensils, mouthed toys, and tissues
- Touching the nose, mouth, and the rash

Once you have had chicken pox or have gotten the vaccine, you usually won't catch it again.

When is chicken pox contagious?

- From two days *before* until five days *after* the rash appears.
- After exposure, it usually takes 11 to 14 (up to 21) days to get sick.

How do I know if my child has chicken pox? By how the rash looks. Doctors usually advise not to bring the child to their offices because the illness could spread to others.

What should I do if my child has chicken pox?

Treatment: Follow your doctor's recommendations:

- Baking soda/oatmeal baths, calamine lotion and antihistamines for itchiness.
- Giving acetaminophen for fever. *Never give aspirin-it can cause a fatal condition called Reye 's Syndrome.*

If your child or anyone at home has immune problems or is pregnant and has never had chicken pox, call your doctor immediately.

Keep your child home: until six days after the start of the rash or when all the lesions are scabbed over. Notify your Head Start program immediately.

To limit the spread:

- Get the new chicken pox vaccine for children over 12 months and adults who never had the disease. Don't expose newborns, pregnant women, or people with immune problems.
- Wipe noses with clean tissues, throw them away, and wash your hands.
- Cough and sneeze into your elbow and away from people.
- Don't share food, pacifiers, bottles, or toothbrushes. Wash eating utensils, drinking cups, and mouthed toys well between uses.
- Don't kiss children on the mouth.