



Chickenpox (Varicella)

What is chickenpox?

- Chickenpox is caused by the varicella-zoster virus.
- It is a very common infection in childhood.
- Chickenpox may be severe in newborns, pregnant women with no history of chickenpox, and persons with weakened immune systems such as leukemia.
- Most cases occur in the late winter and spring.

How does a person get chickenpox?

- The virus is spread by direct contact with airborne droplets from the nose and throat of an infected person or through direct contact with the fluid in a chickenpox blister.
- Chickenpox is most infectious 1 to 2 days before the rash appears.
- It is common for chickenpox to spread to other members of a household.

What are the signs and symptoms?

- Symptoms occur 2 to 3 weeks after a person has been infected with the virus.
- Chickenpox begins with a fever, followed in a day or two by a rash that can be very itchy.
- The rash starts with red spots that turn into fluid-filled blisters. New blisters may form during the next few days. After a few days, crusts form over the blisters.
- Blisters can appear on the skin or other areas such as the eyes, nose and mouth.
- The extent of the rash varies from one person to another.

How is chickenpox treated?

- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Do not give aspirin (ASA) or products that contain aspirin to children or adolescents. Taking aspirin increases the risk of getting Reye's syndrome. This severe illness can damage the liver and brain.
- Warm baths may help to relieve the itching.
- If itching is severe, check with a pharmacist for products that may be helpful.

How is chickenpox prevented?

- Good handwashing and proper disposal of articles soiled by nose and throat secretions may help reduce spread.
- Pregnant women who have no history of chickenpox, and people with weakened immune systems, who have been in contact with the infection, should check with their doctor. Sometimes a special type of immune globulin is given to help prevent infection.
- Exclusion from school or work is not usually necessary, unless the person feels too sick to attend.
- Chickenpox immunization is available for children 12 months of age and for those in grade 6.

For more information contact your doctor or Population and Public Health
at **306-655-4612**
