

CHICKENPOX/WATERPOKKIES/YIRHASHALALA/VARICELLA

Chickenpox is a highly contagious disease caused by a virus.

The usual symptoms are an itchy skin rash that looks like little blisters filled with fluid, less energy than usual, poor appetite, and mild fever. Chickenpox is spread through the air when a child is in close contact with someone who has chickenpox. Touching the rash or objects that the infected child has handled also spreads chickenpox.

Once a person has had chickenpox, it is very rare to get it again.

The chickenpox rash usually occurs around 14 to 21 days **after** exposure.

About 24 to 48 hours before the rash appears, the child will have a slight fever, loss of appetite, and less energy.

After the rash appears, the child will continue to have a slight fever. He may be irritable and fussy because of the itching.

HOW TO KEEP FROM SPREADING CHICKENPOX

The child with chickenpox is contagious (can give chickenpox to others who have never had chickenpox) from 48 hours **before** the rash appears until all the blisters have dried and crusted over. This is usually about 7 days. ***During this time, keep your child home and away from others who have not had chickenpox. Also keep him away from anyone whose immune system is abnormal. The child with active chickenpox should not be in public places like shopping malls, parks, or churches.***

- Call the child's school or day care. Tell them your child has chickenpox.
- Adults who get chickenpox can become very ill. If you have not had chickenpox, avoid contact with an infected child. If you

think you've been exposed, call your doctor. If you have never had chickenpox and are pregnant, call your obstetrician.

- If infants have been near someone who has chickenpox or develops it within 48 hours of exposure, his parents and doctor should be told.
- If another child is on steroid drugs (or has lowered immunity) and is exposed to your child, his parents and doctor should be told.
- Cancel clinic visits, doctor visits, and elective surgery if:
 - -your child has active chickenpox, or
 - -has never had chickenpox but has been exposed to it.

HOW TO CARE FOR YOUR CHILD

- **Do not give aspirin or ibuprofen (Neurofen or Ibugesic etc.) if your child has fever and is uncomfortable. Aspirin can lead to a dangerous illness called Reye's syndrome. Instead, give paracetamol (such as Panado).**
- **Daily baths and clean clothes will prevent the blisters from becoming infected.**
- **Keep your child's fingernails clean and cut short. Put cotton mittens or socks on his hands at night to prevent scratching the rash.**
- **Try not to break the blisters or disturb the scabs. This could leave scars.**

WAYS TO RELIEVE ITCHING

The rash can be very itchy. Most children get irritable and cry a lot. Here are some things you can do to help:

- ***Put Poxclin or calamine lotion (not Caladryl) on the rash 2 to 3 times a day and at bedtime. You can buy both without a prescription.***
- ***Maizena or paste of baking soda (koeksoda) and water on the rash may help to decrease the itching.***
- ***Dress your child as you normally would. Loose, cool clothing is best. If clothing is too warm, it will make the itching worse. It might also increase the fever.***
- ***Try a baking soda bath (koeksoda): Add one cup of baking soda for each 2.5 cm depth of lukewarm bath water. Gently bathe your child and let him play in the water for 15 to 20 minutes. You can do these 2 or 3 times a day. Be sure to stay with your child while he is in the tub. Accidents can happen quickly! ☹***
- ***Other products you can add to bath water include Aveeno® Bath Treatment (use the soothing formula for itchy, irritated skin). Follow the directions on the package. Or try ground porridge oats in a sock hung over the taps when running the bath.***
- ***Play games with your child to take his mind off the itching. ☹***
- ***If your child is old enough, teach him to put pressure with his fingers to the itchy areas for relief, rather than scratching.***

Note: We recommend immunizing your child against chickenpox after the age of 12 months. If you need more information, check with your child's doctor.

WHEN TO CALL THE DOCTOR

- Temperature stays above 39°C.
- Pain in the chest or difficulty breathing

- Your child begins to cough
- Signs of dehydration, such as fewer wet nappies, drowsiness and cold hands and feet
- **Chicken pox blisters look infected (redness, soreness, pus)**
- **A chicken pox blister is very close to the eyes**
- **The child's ears begin to drain, and s/he complains of pain**
- Itching is so intense that your child cannot sleep. Your doctor may prescribe an anti-itch medicine
- Your child has improved and then has sudden, repeated vomiting
- Sudden tiredness or problems with his or her balance
- Fever comes back after going away for more than 24 hours
- New chickenpox rash develops after the 6th day
- If your child has chickenpox and has a baby brothers or sister younger than 6 weeks, your doctor may prescribe treatment for your baby to prevent the development or diminish the symptoms of chickenpox

If you have any questions, be sure to ask your doctor or nurse, or call your child's doctor

Help on the Internet

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/chickenpox/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/rashes-in-children/>

<https://www.sheknows.com/parenting/articles/847473/5-ways-to-soothe-chicken-pox-in-children/>

<https://www.wikihow.com/Treat-Chickenpox-at-Home>

Back to www.pediatric.co.za

