

CHICKENPOX

WHAT IS CHICKENPOX?

Chickenpox (Varicella) is a common childhood infection. It is most common in children and is usually a mild infection. Chickenpox is very dangerous for people with immune system problems like leukemia or for people taking drugs that weaken the immune system.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Chickenpox begins with a fever, followed in a day or two with a rash that can be itchy. The rash soon turns to fluid filled blisters. The blisters dry and form scabs in 4 – 5 days.

HOW IS IT SPREAD?

Chickenpox is most contagious before the rash appears.

It is spread easily -

- From person to person through the air when someone with chickenpox coughs or sneezes.
- From direct contact with liquid from the blisters.
- From a pregnant woman to her baby before birth.

CHICKENPOX VACCINE

There is now a vaccine available. Call your doctor or local health unit to see if your child is eligible for free vaccine. The Canadian Paediatric Society and the National Advisory Committee on Immunization recommend that all healthy children over 12 months of age receive the chickenpox vaccine.

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

1. The best way to protect children is to have them vaccinated.
2. If your child has an immune system disorder contact your doctor if your child has been exposed to chickenpox.
3. If your child gets chickenpox do not give aspirin (A.S.A.) or any products that contain aspirin. To control fever use acetaminophen (Tylenol ®, Tempra ® etc).
4. Your doctor may recommend a cream to prevent itching.

GOING TO DAY CARE OR SCHOOL?

A child can go to day care or school as long as he or she is feeling well enough to participate in activities and does not have a fever.

WHAT IF I'M PREGNANT?

Most adult women are already protected against chickenpox by antibodies in their blood. If you are pregnant or thinking of becoming pregnant and have been exposed to chickenpox call your doctor right away.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the Health Unit at 1-800-660-5853 or visit www.healthunit.org

Source: Canadian Paediatric Society