

Chickenpox - What You Need to Know

This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Hi, I'm Jessica Leung, a researcher at CDC. Today, we're talking about chickenpox, its symptoms, how it spreads, and how to protect you and your family from getting it.

If you had chickenpox as a child, you probably remember having lots of itchy blisters and being pretty uncomfortable. Chickenpox is most common in children, but it's not just kids who get the disease. Anyone who hasn't had chickenpox and isn't vaccinated with the chickenpox vaccine can get infected.

Chickenpox can be serious for some people, including pregnant women, infants younger than one, and those with a weak immune system; they should stay away from anyone who has chickenpox.

Chickenpox is caused by varicella zoster virus. It spreads easily in the air from person-to-person when someone who is infected coughs or sneezes. It can also be spread by touching fluid from the chickenpox blisters. It takes 10 to 21 days after contact with an infected person to develop chickenpox. Once infected, you may get a fever and headache and feel fatigued.

The classic symptom of chickenpox is a rash that turns into itchy, fluid-filled blisters which eventually become scabs. The rash may show up first on the face, chest, and back and 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.

Chickenpox is usually mild, but it can cause serious complications and even death. It can lead to pneumonia, inflammation of the brain, and bleeding problems. If the blisters get infected, the infection can spread to the whole body.

The *best* way to prevent chickenpox is by getting vaccinated. Chickenpox vaccine is widely used in the United States and is very safe. Before we had a vaccine, chickenpox was very common in this country—about four million people would get the disease each year.

CDC recommends that children get two doses of chickenpox vaccine – the first dose at 12 to 15 months of age and a second dose at four to six years of age. Older children, teenagers, and adults should also get two doses of the vaccine if they've never had chickenpox. This is important because chickenpox can cause severe disease in adolescents and adults. People who only got one dose of chickenpox vaccine should get a second dose.

Two doses of vaccine are very effective at preventing chickenpox. While some people who were vaccinated may get chickenpox, it's rare in people who have received two doses of vaccine. Chickenpox in vaccinated people is usually mild—with no fever and few blisters or only some red bumps that heal quickly. It's important to remember that if a vaccinated person gets chickenpox, they can still spread it to others.

If someone in your house has chickenpox, you should follow a few simple precautions:

- Check with your health care provider to see if you or anyone else in your household should be vaccinated,
- Wash bed linens and bath towels often that have been used by the infected person,
- Make sure everyone in the household washes their hands frequently with soap and water,
- Teach young children about the best way to cover coughs and sneezes, and
- Ask your health care provider for some ways to ease the itching.

To get more information, visit www.cdc.gov and type the word *chickenpox* in the search box.

For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.