

# FACT SHEET

# Chickenpox

## What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a highly contagious viral disease caused by the varicella zoster virus, a type of herpes virus. Typically, the person experiences cold-like symptoms, a fever and a blister-like rash but can have very serious complications such as pneumonia, organ damage and sometimes death. Chickenpox is very contagious. A person of any age can get chickenpox. The symptoms and complications of chickenpox range from mild to severe.

## How is it spread?

Chickenpox can be spread in several different ways, including:

- Direct contact with fluid from blisters of an infected person,
- Contact with objects that are contaminated with fluid from blisters or the mucous membranes of an infected person, or
- Breathing in droplets projected into the air by an infected person through coughing, sneezing, etc.

Usually, symptoms occur within 2-3 weeks after exposure. A person is typically contagious 1-2 days before rash onset until all blisters are crusted (usually five days).

*This fact sheet is for informational purposes only and is not intended for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).*

## What are the symptoms?

- Symptoms include slight fever, flu or cold-like symptoms followed by crops of a pimple-like rash.
- The pimple-like rash progresses to water filled blisters and blisters progress to scabs.
- Rash can be present in all stages and causes itching.
- Rash is concentrated on the central portion of the body, mostly on the trunk and face.
- Rash can also occur on scalp and mucous membranes.

## How can it be prevented?

Chickenpox can be prevented by vaccine. Everyone, including children, adolescents, and adults, should get two doses of chickenpox vaccine if they have never had chickenpox or were never vaccinated. The chickenpox vaccine prevents almost all cases of severe illness.

## How is it treated?

There is no cure for chickenpox. Treatment is supportive care to relieve symptoms and address complications. A person with chickenpox should stay home and should be excluded from work or school for at least five days after the first appearance of the rash and until the entire rash has formed scabs. Avoid susceptible/ immunosuppressed individuals and consult with your doctor for diagnosis and/or treatment. Antiviral medications can be used in certain situations.

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