



Durham Region Health Department **Facts about...**



Chickenpox

What is it?

Chickenpox is a highly contagious disease caused by the varicella-zoster virus (VZV). This virus is most common in children and is usually mild. However, chickenpox can cause complications including bacterial infections on the skin, as well as infections in the blood, brain, and lungs.

How is it spread?

Chickenpox is easily spread from person to person through saliva, sneezing, coughing, and contact with fluid from the blisters. When there has been contact with an infected person it takes about 10 to 21 days before symptoms develop. People who have chickenpox can spread the virus 1-2 days before the onset of the rash until all of the chickenpox blisters are crusted (usually about five days after the rash onset). Children can continue to go to school or daycare if they feel well enough to attend. If your child has a fever or is too sick to participate in activities, they should stay home.

What do I look for?

- Chickenpox often begins with fever, headache, loss of appetite, and feeling tired.
- A rash that turns into itchy, fluid-filled blisters.
- The rash may show up on the chest, back, and face, and then spread over the entire body.
- Some people will have only a few blisters. Others may have as many as 500.
- In about one week, all the blisters will turn into scabs.
- Complications of chickenpox can include infections of the skin, lungs, brain, and blood.

How is it treated?

Treatment is under the direction of your health care provider.

Varicella infection in pregnancy requires prompt treatment within 24-48 hours of the onset of the rash.

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905-668-2020 or 1-800-841-2729 | durham.ca/health

If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 1-800-841-2729.



Chickenpox can be serious in:

- People with weakened immune systems
- Newborns whose mothers have chickenpox from 5 days before to 2 days after delivery
- Premature babies
- Pregnant women who are not immune to chickenpox

How can I protect my children and myself?

- Chickenpox is best prevented by vaccination.
- See 'Facts About...Varicella (Chickenpox) Vaccine'
- Varicella vaccine is effective in preventing illness or decreasing the seriousness of the illness if used within 3 to 5 days after being in contact with someone who has chickenpox.
- **Varicella – Zoster Immune Globulin (Varlg)** may be offered to newborns, pregnant women and persons with immune system problems and should be given within 96 hours of exposure - see your health care provider right away.
- Keep up to date with vaccinations and speak to your health care provider about your need for additional vaccines.
- When the rash appears, keep nails clean and short to prevent infection from spreading (mittens can be used on infants).
- Suspect infection if the fluid in the blisters becomes cloudy or pus filled and if the skin around the blisters becomes red, hot or swollen.
- Wash your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer when hands are not visibly dirty.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow and encourage others to do the same.
- Wash your hands after handling nose and throat discharges (e.g., after disposal of facial tissues).
- Do not share water bottles, straws, eating utensils, cigarettes, toothbrushes, toys or anything else that has been in contact with saliva, nose or throat secretions.
- If you are ill, stay at home and isolate yourself from others.

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