



Symptom relief

While you have the infection:

- drink plenty of fluids
- take paracetamol for fever and pain
- use soothing lotions such as calamine lotion or oils to reduce itching
- add sodium bicarbonate or oatmeal to a bath to soothe itching
- take antihistamine medication to help with itching
- if you have blisters in your mouth, don't eat foods with a lot of acid or salt. Soothing mouth washes are also available.

Reye's syndrome

Never give aspirin to a child under 16 who has chickenpox – it increases the risk of a serious illness called Reye's syndrome which can follow a viral infection such as chickenpox, that causes brain damage and can be life threatening.

How do I reduce the risks of getting chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a vaccine preventable disease.

Vaccination is recommended for children from the age of 18 months.

Some people who have been vaccinated against chickenpox can still get the disease. However, symptoms are usually milder with fewer scabs and mild or no fever.

Remember

- Chickenpox is highly contagious.
- Chickenpox can cause serious health complications.
- Your chance of catching chickenpox is highly reduced through vaccination.
- Isolate your child from others if they show symptoms of infection (e.g. fever, lethargy, rash) after being exposed to someone infected with chickenpox.

Make an appointment with your doctor or local community health nurse to get vaccinated.

healthywa.wa.gov.au



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Chickenpox

- **Chickenpox is serious and can make children very sick**
- **Symptoms are even worse in adults, and sometimes lead to hospitalisation and in some extreme cases, even death**
- **Vaccinating is easy and free for toddlers and year 8 students**

What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a highly contagious disease caused by the varicella-zoster virus.

Most children who get chickenpox have a mild illness but some can become quite sick. Infection is more severe in adults and can cause serious and fatal illnesses in people with low immunity (including pregnant women).

Chickenpox causes a generalised, itchy rash of 200-500 tiny blisters. It typically starts on the trunk and face and spreads to the limbs.

How do you get chickenpox?

Chickenpox infection spreads easily through coughing and sneezing or by touching the fluid from the blisters.

If you have chickenpox you will be contagious (able to spread the virus) from up to two days before the red spots appear, until around five days after all scabs or crusts are dry.

Over 90% of your close contacts (such as family and friends) may also catch it if they have not previously been infected with chickenpox or have not been immunised against chickenpox.

Chickenpox usually takes around 14 to 16 days to develop after contact with someone who has it.

Who is most at risk?

Chickenpox poses particular dangers for some people, including pregnant women and people with low immunity.

If a pregnant woman gets chickenpox in the first or early second trimester of pregnancy, there is a small chance the baby could be born with birth defects.

Pregnant women who become infected with chickenpox are also at increased risk of serious and potentially life threatening complications.

These people should see a doctor urgently if they come into contact with the virus.

Ideally, women planning pregnancy should get their immunity checked to see if they have had the disease in the past and are now protected. If not, women planning pregnancy should consider getting vaccinated against chickenpox.

Signs and symptoms

Chickenpox usually starts with cold-like symptoms such as a runny nose and mild fever, which is followed by a red spotty rash and generally feeling unwell.

The spots start as red, itchy, raised lumps and then dry up to form scabs, which can look like blisters. The watery fluid inside the blister is infectious to other people if touched.

The scabs can take five days or longer to fall off, depending on when they appear after the infection.

The spots are very itchy, and scratching them can cause infection. An infected spot is much more likely to leave a scar. However due to the itchiness, it can be very hard to get children to stop scratching the spots.

How do I get treated?

If you suspect you or your child has chickenpox, see your doctor for diagnosis.

Chickenpox infection cannot be treated with antibiotics. Treatment is usually only given for the relief of symptoms.

People who have severe health conditions that affect their immune system and pregnant women may be able to get some antiviral medications. Speak to your doctor if this applies to you.

Chickenpox is a notifiable disease. This means doctors, hospitals and laboratories must inform the Department of Health of your diagnosis. Notification is confidential.

