

CHICKEN POX

Chicken pox (varicella) was a common childhood illness before the varicella vaccine became available. The diagnosis is made when the characteristic fluid-filled, small blister-like rash appears all over the body. The blisters break and crust over. After your child is exposed to chicken pox, the first symptoms will begin within 14 to 21 days, starting with a slight runny nose, sore throat, headache and mild fever. One or 2 days later the rash will develop; fever at that time is uncommon. The rash will be quite itchy. After about the 6th day, no new blisters should develop. The child is contagious from 1 to 2 days before the rash appears until the very last blister has popped and crusted over which takes approximately one week.

It is important not to let your child scratch the scabs. Scratching can cause scarring or infection. Keep your child's fingernails short. You can give Benedryl for the itch. To keep the sores clean, bathe the child daily. Aveeno (available at drug stores) in the baths is soothing. Tylenol or Motrin may be given to reduce pain and fever. NEVER use aspirin or any products containing aspirin.

You should call the doctor in the following situations:

- if the blisters become very red, swollen and/or pussy
- if the child's temperature is 102 F or higher.
- if the child is extremely lethargic
- if the child complains that light bothers her eyes
- if the child complains of headache
- if the child gets sick one or 2 weeks after the chicken pox with headache, lethargy and persistent vomiting, especially if there is blood in the vomit. These are the symptoms of Reye's syndrome (Reye's DOES NOT cause a fever).

Other Information about Chicken Pox:

- Anyone who has had the chicken pox is immune to them, and exposure is not harmful.
- A pregnant woman who develops chicken pox within one week prior to delivery should notify her doctor. Her illness may be dangerous for the baby.
- Newborns are relatively immune to chicken pox for the first 5 to 6 months of life if the mother had the illness in the past.
- Adults who are not immune and have been exposed should contact their own doctors.
- Do not ever purposely expose your child to any illness, chicken pox included.
- Chicken pox can be prevented after one year of age by receiving Varivax, the chicken pox immunization. The vaccine can help prevent infection if given within 3 days of exposure to the virus.