

# Chickenpox (varicella) General Information

## What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is caused by a virus called *varicella-zoster*. Chickenpox is a very common infection in childhood and is usually a mild disease. Chickenpox can be very serious for people who have immune diseases like leukemia or AIDS. Pregnant women who have not had chickenpox may be affected, and their unborn babies may be at risk.

## Who can get chickenpox?

Children most often get chickenpox, however adults can get it too if they haven't had the disease or the vaccine. When adults get it, they can be very sick.

## What are the symptoms?

The chickenpox virus lives in the nose and throat and in the blisters on the skin. It is spread by direct contact with infected fluids from these areas. The virus can be spread for about 1-2 days before a rash appears and up until the blisters are crusted over.

The symptoms may include:

- fever
- itchy rash that begins as small fluid-filled blisters that dry and form scabs
- tiredness

These symptoms may start 2-3 weeks after the individual has been in contact with someone with the chickenpox.

## What is the treatment?

Most people do not need treatment for chickenpox. People at high risk and pregnant women can get varicella zoster immune globulin or antiviral medication.

**DO NOT give any ASA or aspirin to children or adolescents with chickenpox.** ASA may increase the chance that a child gets Reye's syndrome which is a severe illness that can damage the liver and brain.

## How can you prevent chickenpox?

There is a vaccine that can prevent chickenpox. You can obtain this vaccine for your child from your health care provider.

A child with illness can return to school or daycare as soon as he or she is well enough to participate normally in all activities, regardless of the state of the rash.