

# Chickenpox

Chickenpox is a familiar disease that commonly affects children, but can strike anyone. Thanks to advancements in vaccination, most people don't have to endure an infection.

## What is Chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a very contagious disease caused by the varicella-zoster virus (VZV). It causes a blister-like rash, itching, tiredness, and fever.

It spreads easily among infected people who have never had chickenpox or received the chickenpox vaccine. It mostly spreads in the air, through coughing or sneezing, although you can also contract it by touching or breathing in the virus particles that come from chickenpox blisters. Anyone who hasn't had chickenpox or received the chickenpox vaccine can get the disease, which usually causes an illness lasting about 5-10 days.

## Signs and Symptoms

Chickenpox isn't hard to spot: the most recognizable sign is a rash that turns into itchy, fluid-filled blisters that eventually become scabs. The rash may first show up on the face, chest, and back, then spread to the rest of the body, including inside the mouth, eyelids, or genital area. It usually takes about one week for all the blisters to become scabs.

Other typical symptoms that may begin to appear 1-2 days before rash include high fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, or headache.



Complications from chickenpox can occur, though that is uncommon for otherwise healthy people who get the disease. Those who may have more severe symptoms or may be at higher risk for complications include infants, teens, adults, seniors, pregnant women, and people with weakened immune systems. Serious complications from chickenpox include dehydration, pneumonia, bleeding problems, infection or inflammation of the brain, and various bacterial infections. Call a doctor if anyone who is considered high-risk contracts the virus.

The best way to prevent chickenpox is to get the chickenpox vaccine. Children, adolescents, and adults should have two doses of chickenpox vaccine. The vaccine is very safe and effective at preventing the disease, and most people who get it will not become infected with chickenpox. If a vaccinated person does get chickenpox, it is usually mild—with fewer blisters and mild or no fever. The chickenpox vaccine almost entirely prevents the disease from becoming severe.

## Treatment

Several things can be done at home to help relieve symptoms and prevent skin infections. Calamine lotion and colloidal oatmeal baths may help relieve some of the itching. Keeping fingernails trimmed short may help prevent skin infections caused by scratching blisters.

Over-the-counter non-aspirin medications, such as acetaminophen, can relieve fever from chickenpox (avoid aspirin-based medicine, as it can be dangerous). Never hesitate to talk to your doctor. Visit <http://www.cdc.gov/chickenpox/index.html>

## HIGHLIGHTS

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The Miami-Dade County Health Department provides immunization services to protect against chickenpox and other infectious diseases. Call 786-845-0550 to schedule an appointment or learn more.

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