

Chickenpox

Chickenpox is a highly contagious illness caused by primary infection with varicella zoster virus (VZV). It generally starts with a vesicular skin rash appearing in two or three waves, mainly on the body and head rather than the hands and becoming itchy raw pockmarks, small open sores which heal mostly without scarring.

Chickenpox has an incubation period of 10 to 21 days, and is spread easily through coughs or sneezes of ill individuals, or through direct contact with secretions from the rash. Following primary infection there is usually lifelong protective immunity from further episodes of chickenpox.



Signs and symptoms

Chickenpox is a highly infectious disease that spreads from person to person by direct contact or by air from an infected person's coughing or sneezing. Touching the fluid from a chickenpox blister can also spread the disease. A person with chickenpox is infectious from one to five days before the rash appears. The contagious period continues until all blisters have formed scabs, which may take 5 to 10 days. It takes from 10 to 21 days after contact with an infected person for someone to develop chickenpox.

The chicken pox lesions (blisters) start as a two to four millimeter red papule which develops an irregular outline (a rose petal). A thin-walled, clear vesicle (dew drop) develops on top of the area of redness. This "dew drop on a rose petal" lesion is very characteristic of chickenpox. After about 8 to 12 hours the fluid in the vesicle becomes cloudy and the vesicle breaks leaving a crust. The fluid is highly contagious, but once the lesion crusts over, it is not considered contagious. The crust usually falls off after seven days sometimes leaving a crater-like scar. Although one lesion goes through this complete cycle in about seven days, another hallmark of chickenpox is that new lesions crop up every day for several days. Therefore it may be a week

before new lesions stop appearing and existing lesions crust over. Children should not be sent back to school until all lesions have crusted over.[6]

It is not necessary to have contact with the infected person for the disease to spread. Infected persons can spread chickenpox before they know they have the disease, i.e. before any rash develops. They can infect others from about two days before the rash develops until all the sores have crusted over, usually four or five days after the rash starts.

Prevention :

A varicella vaccine. Protection is not lifelong and further vaccination is necessary five years after the initial immunization.

Treatment :

Although there have been no formal clinical studies evaluating the effectiveness of topical application of calamine lotion, a topical barrier preparation containing zinc oxide and one of the most commonly used interventions, it has an excellent safety profile. It is important to maintain good hygiene and daily cleaning of skin with warm water to avoid secondary bacterial infection. Addition of a small quantity of vinegar to the water is sometimes advocated.

To relieve the symptoms of chicken pox, people commonly use anti-itching creams and lotions. A very effective cream to use is hydrocortisone. These lotions are not to be used on the face or close to the eyes.

Children :

If oral acyclovir is started within 24 hours of rash onset it decreases symptoms by one day but has no effect on complication rates.

Adults :

Infection in otherwise healthy adults tends to be more severe and active; treatment with antiviral drugs (e.g. acyclovir) is generally advised, as long as it is started within 24–48 hours from rash onset. Patients of any age with depressed immune systems or extensive eczema are at risk of more severe disease and should also be treated with antiviral medication.