

What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a viral infection that causes a red, itchy rash on the skin that resembles tiny blisters. It is mostly seen in children, but anyone who has not had the chickenpox can still get the disease.

What are the symptoms of chickenpox?

The symptoms of chickenpox include an initial onset of a fever, feeling tired and weak. These initial symptoms are followed by an itchy blister-like rash. The blisters will eventually dry up and scab over about five days after the onset of the rash. The rash usually starts on the face, stomach, chest, or back, and spreads to other parts of the body. Chickenpox symptoms begin about ten to 21 days after exposure and last until the rash scabs over (about five days after the onset of the rash).

What are the complications of chickenpox?

Chickenpox is usually a mild disease and not life threatening in otherwise healthy children, but can be serious in newborn babies, adults, and other persons who have a weakened immune system (such as HIV, cancer, or organ transplant patients). These persons have a higher risk for complications such as severe skin infections, scars, pneumonia, brain damage, and even death. Reye's syndrome has been a potentially serious complication associated with chickenpox involving those children who have been treated with aspirin.

What is Reye's syndrome?

Reye's syndrome is a disease which affects all organs of the body, especially the liver and the brain. It is almost always associated with a previous viral infection, such as influenza, cold, or chickenpox. Reye's syndrome is not contagious and the cause is unknown.

How is chickenpox spread, and how long can you spread chickenpox to others?

Chickenpox is highly contagious and is spread person-to-person by coughing, sneezing, or touching the rash. Chickenpox can be transmitted indirectly by contact with articles freshly soiled by discharges from the infected person's lesions. People with chickenpox can spread the disease from one to two days before symptoms start until all the lesions are crusted over (about five days). However, people with weak immune systems are contagious longer, usually as long as new blisters keep appearing. If you have the chickenpox, stay away from others until the blisters are dry and crusted. Persons with chickenpox must stay out of school and daycare until all blisters have dried and crusted.

What is the treatment for chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a virus and antibiotics are not recommended for treatment. However, most chickenpox treatments are to treat symptoms, and health care providers may treat these symptoms of chickenpox with calamine lotion, plenty of fluids and/or medications for fever and pain. **Do not give a child aspirin**, which can cause Reye syndrome in children with viral infections. Acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) can be given to reduce fever and "itchyness."

How can chickenpox be prevented?

Chickenpox can be prevented by the chickenpox vaccine and is recommended for all children at 12 to 18 months of age and older children who have not had chickenpox. Sometimes people who have been vaccinated will still get chickenpox (called 'breakthrough disease'). If vaccinated people do get chickenpox, it is usually mild and short lived. However, if you or your child have breakthrough chickenpox, it can still be passed to others whom have not had the disease.

Can a person get chickenpox more than once?

Yes, but it is uncommon. Chickenpox usually results in lifelong immunity. However, sometimes the infection remains hidden and can reoccur years later as shingles.

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