



VARICELLA (CHICKENPOX) FACT SHEET

What is varicella (chickenpox)?

Chickenpox is an infectious disease caused by the varicella-zoster virus usually lasting 5-10 days. Chickenpox results in a blister-like rash, itching, tiredness and fever. The rash appears first on the trunk and face but can spread over the entire body causing 250 to 500 itchy blisters.

How do you get chickenpox?

Chickenpox is highly infectious and spreads from person to person by direct contact or through the air from an infected person's coughing or sneezing. A person with chickenpox is contagious 1-2 days before the rash appears and until all blisters have formed scabs. It takes from 10-21 days after contact with an infected person for someone to develop chickenpox.

Who gets chickenpox?

Anyone can get chickenpox. However, most cases of chickenpox occur in persons less than 15 years of age. Certain groups of people are more likely to have more serious illness with complications. These include:

- adults
- infants
- adolescents
- people with weak immune systems from either illnesses or from medications such as long-term steroids

What are the serious complications from chickenpox?

Serious complications from chickenpox include bacterial infections, which can involve many sites of the body including the skin, tissues under the skin, bone, lungs (pneumonia), joints and the blood. Other serious complications are due directly to the virus infection and include viral pneumonia, bleeding problems and infection of the brain (encephalitis). Rarely, death can occur if medical care is not given soon enough.

Can chickenpox be prevented?

Yes, chickenpox can now be prevented by vaccination.

Can you get chickenpox more than once?

Yes, but it is uncommon. For most people, one infection may provide lifelong protection from getting the disease again.

Where can I get more information on varicella?

www.cdc.gov

www.dshs.state.tx.us

Source of Information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

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