

Chicken Pox

What you should know about this common childhood disease

Chicken pox is a common and very contagious childhood disease.

But, as far as diseases go, chicken pox is relatively harmless. Your child will get a rash, blisters, and usually a slight fever. For most children, the worst part is the itching caused by the blisters.

Only in rare cases do children come down with secondary infections that are related to chicken pox, such as pneumonia and encephalitis.

Chicken pox, which is a viral infection, commonly affects children between the ages of 5 and 9 years. It usually lasts about a week.

Children are contagious from about 24 hours before the rash appears until all of the blisters have dried into scabs.

Because children are contagious before you know they are infected, chicken pox is easily spread among brothers and sisters and friends and classmates.

On Back

Symptoms, the vaccine, and what you should do when your child comes down with chicken pox.

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You & Your Child



Chicken Pox: Understanding this common childhood disease

Symptoms

A slight temperature, followed by a rash

The earliest symptom of chicken pox is a slight fever. This is usually followed by a rash in about 24 hours.

The rash usually starts on the scalp and trunk and moves down to the face and legs and eventually to the entire body.

The blisters usually make a child uncomfortable

As the rash spreads, red, blister-like bumps appear over the child's body. These blisters can be very itchy and very uncomfortable.

The blisters usually break within a day or two and then scab over and heal.

The itching is most intense when the blisters break.

What You Should Do

Consult your doctor

You should call your physician when your child comes down with the chicken pox. There are a few simple treatments your doctor may recommend to help make your child more comfortable.

A doctor may recommend antihistamines to help ease the itching that the blisters bring on.

To reduce your child's fever, some doctors may recommend an **ASPIRIN SUBSTITUTE** instead of regular aspirin. Brand name aspirin substitutes include children's formula Tylenol and children's formula Motrin.

Get your doctor's advice before giving your child any kind of treatment for chicken pox.

Never give your child real aspirin

Real aspirin should **NEVER** be given to a child with chicken pox.

Chicken pox is a viral infection. Giving aspirin for viral infections has been linked to Reye's syndrome. Reye's syndrome is a dangerous nerve disorder. It can be fatal.

Keep your child clean

Keeping your child clean helps to prevent infection.

You can also keep your child's nails trimmed to prevent scratching. And baking soda baths often help relieve itching.

Chicken Pox Vaccine

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that all children receive the chicken pox vaccine between 12-18 months of age. They also recommend that older children and adults who have not had chicken pox receive the vaccine as well.

Although chicken pox is a relatively harmless disease, the immunization is recommended because many infants and toddlers can't help scratching themselves and scratching can lead to infection and scars.

Also, because children must stay at home until they are no longer contagious, the vaccine reduces the amount of time that caregivers need to miss work to stay home and care for children.

The number of shots needed depends on your child's age

Children ages 12 years and younger need a single shot of the vaccine.

Children who are 13 years and older need two shots, 4 to 8 weeks apart.

Because the vaccine is still relatively new, it is not yet known whether children who receive the vaccine will have to get a booster shot sometime in years to come.

The vaccine also appears to reduce the risks of shingles

One other benefit of the vaccine is that it appears to reduce the risk of developing shingles later in life.

Shingles are related to chicken pox. A person who has shingles will suffer painful, localized blisters. Shingles tend to develop when the immune system is weakened due to illness, stress, or old age.

Side effects of the vaccine are few

There are a few side effects associated with the chicken pox vaccine.

First, there is usually some soreness where the injection was given, as there is with most vaccinations.

Also, 1 percent to 3 percent of children given the vaccine still contract a very mild case of chicken pox, but this experience is still better than a full-blown case.

