

Patient Information
Chicken Pox
(Varicella Zoster Virus)

Infection Prevention Team

The Infection Prevention Team have designed this leaflet to answer some questions about **CHICKEN POX (Varicella Zoster Virus)**.

If you are concerned about chicken pox, please ask the nursing staff to arrange an appointment with the Consultant caring for your child (if in hospital) or your GP if your child is at home.

What is Chicken Pox?

Chicken Pox is a disease which is caused by a virus. It is extremely common, particularly in children. Most people have had Chicken Pox by the time they are 15 years old.

Is Chicken Pox serious?

No, it is usually quite mild and uneventful, although it is an unpleasant illness. Severe infection is unusual, but can be seen in newborn babies and people whose immune systems are not working effectively (people with Leukaemia, people taking steroid treatment etc.)

Is Chicken Pox infectious?

Chicken Pox is highly infectious for 1-2 days before the rash appears and for about 5 days after until the spots are dry and scabbed. The virus is airborne and is also present in secretions from the nose and mouth. Any contacts who do not have immunity to chicken pox (normally young children who have not had the illness) are extremely likely to develop it. Contacts usually develop the illness 2-3 weeks later.

How can I be sure it is chicken pox?

Your GP can usually diagnose chicken pox simply by looking at the rash. Occasionally, GPs may request further tests to confirm the diagnosis.

What are the symptoms?

- Feel generally unwell
- Raised temperature
- Develop a red bumpy rash which usually turns into small fluid filled blisters.

How is chicken pox treated?

Chicken pox is caused by a virus and cannot be treated with antibiotics as these only kill bacteria. The following symptoms and discomfort can be relieved by:-

- **Itchiness**

Calamine lotion can be applied with cotton wool/gauze. This has a cooling effect. Try to discourage scratching as this can lead to scarring. Scratch mittens can help to prevent babies from scratching themselves. Keeping the individual cool, and using fresh cotton linen can also help discourage scratching.

- **Discomfort/irritability**

Calpol (children's paracetamol) can be used to help bring down a temperature but should only be used for babies over 3 months. Use this on the advice of your GP. Adults may benefit from taking Paracetamol tablets. **Always read the instructions on the bottle.**

What will happen if admission to hospital is required?

If admitted to hospital you will be nursed in a single room with the door closed until you are no longer thought to be infectious.

If you have been in contact with anyone who has not had chicken pox or shingles before your admission they should not visit you whilst in hospital as they could potentially be infectious.

If they are concerned they should contact their GP for advice.

Can anything be done to protect people who would be severely affected by chicken pox?

The first precaution is to avoid contact with anyone known to have chicken pox until all the spots have dried up.

People who are particularly susceptible to the virus and have been in contact with chicken pox can have their blood tested for chicken pox immunity. If they have no immunity they may be given an injection of "Immunoglobulin". This will not stop chicken pox from developing, but can make it less severe. However, this immunity will only last for 3 weeks.

Pregnant women who have not had chicken pox should avoid contact. If contact does occur, they should seek advice from their GP.

Where can I get more information?

Further information is available from the **Infection Prevention Team**. If you wish to see any of them, please ask the ward staff to contact them.

INFECTION PREVENTION TEAM

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