Explaination

Chickenpox is a very contagious disease caused by the varicella-zoster virus (VZV). It causes a blister-like rash, itching, tiredness, and fever. Chickenpox can be serious, especially in babies, adults, and people with weakened immune systems.

Transmission

Chicken Pox spreads easily from infected people to others who have never had chickenpox or received the chickenpox vaccine. Chickenpox spreads in the air through coughing or sneezing. It can also be spread by touching or breathing in the virus particles that come from chickenpox blisters. Chickenpox most commonly causes an illness that lasts about 5-10 days. Children usually miss 5 to 6 days of school or childcare due to their chickenpox.

Chickenpox can also be spread from people with shingles. Varicella-zoster virus also causes shingles. A person with shingles can spread the virus to others who have never had chickenpox or received the chickenpox vaccine. In these cases, the exposed person might develop chickenpox.

A person with chickenpox can spread the disease from 1 to 2 days before they get the rash until all their chickenpox blisters have formed scabs. It takes from 10 to 21 days after exposure to a person with chickenpox or shingles for someone to develop chickenpox. If a person vaccinated for chickenpox gets the disease, they can still spread it to others. For most people, getting chickenpox once provides immunity for life. However, for a few people, they can get chickenpox more than once, although this is not common.

Symptoms

The classic symptom of chickenpox is a rash that turns into itchy, fluid-filled blisters that eventually turn into scabs. The rash may first show up on the face, chest, and back then spread to the rest of the body, including inside the mouth, eyelids, or genital area. It usually takes about one week for all the blisters to become scabs.

Other typical symptoms that may begin to appear 1-2 days before rash include:

• high fever
• tiredness
• loss of appetite
• headache

Prevention

The best way to prevent chickenpox is to get the chickenpox vaccine. Before the vaccine, about 4 million people would get chickenpox each year in the United States. Also, about 10,600 people were hospitalized and 100 to 150 died each year as a result of chickenpox.
Some people who have been vaccinated against chickenpox can still get the disease. However, the symptoms are usually milder with fewer blisters and mild or no fever. About 25% to 30% of vaccinated people who get chickenpox will develop illness as serious as chickenpox in unvaccinated persons.

**Treatment**

There are several things that can be done at home to help relieve the symptoms and prevent skin infections. Calamine lotion and colloidal oatmeal baths may help relieve some of the itching. Keeping fingernails trimmed short may help prevent skin infections caused by scratching blisters.

**Over-the-counter Medications**

Use non-aspirin medications, such as acetaminophen, to relieve fever from chickenpox.

Do not use aspirin or aspirin-containing products to relieve fever from chickenpox. The use of aspirin in children with chickenpox has been associated with Reye’s syndrome, a severe disease that affects the liver and brain and can cause death.

**When to Call the Health Care Provider**

For people with chickenpox at risk of serious complications, call a health care provider if the person

- is older than 12 years of age
- has a weakened immune system
- is pregnant
- develops any of the following: fever that lasts longer than 4 days
  - fever that rises above 102°F (38.9°C)
  - any areas of the rash or any part of the body becomes very red, warm, or tender, or begins leaking pus (thick, discolored fluid), since these symptoms may indicate a bacterial infection
  - extreme illness
  - difficult waking up or confused demeanor
  - difficulty walking
  - stiff neck
  - frequent vomiting
  - difficulty breathing
  - severe cough
Treatments Prescribed by Your Doctor for People with Chickenpox

Your health care provider can advise you on treatment options. Antiviral medications are recommended for people with chickenpox who are more likely to develop serious disease including

• otherwise healthy people older than 12 years of age
• people with chronic skin or lung disease
• people receiving steroid therapy
• some groups of pregnant women

Acyclovir, an antiviral medication, is licensed for treatment of chickenpox. For more information, see Acyclovir Treatment. Other antiviral medications that may also work against chickenpox include valacyclovir and famciclovir.