

Matron's Medical Advice Sheet No. 2

Chickenpox Advice for Parents

Chickenpox is a highly infectious viral illness, which mostly affects children, although you can get it at any age. It usually gets better by itself within a week without needing to see a GP. You can catch chickenpox by being in the same room as someone with it. It's also spread by touching clothes or bedding that has fluid from the blisters on it.

Symptoms

After coming in contact with someone who has chickenpox it can take 1 to 3 weeks for the spots to start appearing.

- Stage 1 -Chicken pox starts with red spots that can appear anywhere on the body.



- Stage 2 - The spots fill with fluid and these blisters may burst. Spots might stay in one area or spread to other areas of the body.



- Stage 3 - The spots begin to scab over, however new spots may still be appearing.



Other symptoms may include:

- a sudden fever – a temperature of 38C or above
- aching body (especially arms and legs)
- loss of appetite
- Chickenpox is very itchy and can make children feel miserable, even if they don't have many spots. Chickenpox is usually much worse in adults. It's possible to get chickenpox more than once, although it's unusual.

How long chickenpox is infectious for?

Chickenpox is usually infectious from 2 days before the spots appeared until 5 days after they first appeared.

You'll need to keep your child stay away from school or nursery until they've stopped getting any *new spots* **and** *for at least 5 days after the first spots appeared*.

But you don't need to wait until all the spots have healed or crusted over before going back as the risk of spreading it to others is very small after 5 days.

Self help

To help your child get better more quickly:

- rest and sleep
- keep warm
- take calpol to lower their temperature and treat aches and pains
- DO NOT TAKE NEUROFEN as this can make your child very ill
- drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration (pee should be light yellow or clear). Try ice lollies if your child has a painful mouth.
- put socks on your child's hands at night to stop scratching
- cut your child's nails
- use cooling creams or gels from your pharmacy
- speak to your pharmacist about using antihistamine medicine to help itching
- bathe in cool water and pat the skin dry (don't rub)
- dress in loose clothes

When to get help

Call NHS 111 or see your GP if:

- you are unsure what the rash is (not chicken pox rash)
- you're child is dehydrated
- the skin around the blisters is red, hot or painful (signs of infection)
- you're worried about your baby's or child's symptoms
- you have a long-term medical condition – for example, diabetes or a heart, lung, kidney or neurological disease
- you have a weakened immune system – for example, because of chemotherapy or HIV
- your symptoms don't improve after 7 days

Tell the receptionist you think it's chickenpox before going in. They may recommend a special appointment time if other patients are at risk.

When to return to school

Your child can return to school if:

- they've stopped getting any new spots and for at least 5 days after the first spots appeared
- they are not drowsy or lethargic
- they have not had a temperature of over 38.0 for at least 24hrs
- they have not been sick or had diarrhea for at least 48hrs
- **they are well enough to cope with a full school day**

Prevention

The following advice can help to prevent the spread of infection:

- stay home (see time limits above), this limits the spread from one person to another.
- you can get the chickenpox vaccine on the NHS if there's a risk of harming someone with a weakened immune system (for example, a child could be vaccinated if one of their parents was having chemotherapy).
- you can pay for the vaccine at some private clinics or travel clinics. It costs between £120 and £200.

Shingles and chickenpox

You can't catch shingles from someone with chickenpox. You can catch chickenpox from someone with shingles if you haven't had chickenpox before. When you get chickenpox, the virus stays in your body. It can be triggered again if your immune system is low and cause shingles. This can be because of stress, certain conditions, or treatments like chemotherapy.