

# CHICKENPOX

## **What is chickenpox?**

Chickenpox is a contagious disease caused by a virus called *Varicella-zoster*.

## **What are the symptoms of chickenpox?**

Symptoms usually occur about two weeks after exposure. Initial symptoms include sudden onset of fever and feeling tired and weak. Soon after, an itchy blister-like rash will appear on the body, possibly including on the eyelids and in the mouth. New spots (lesions) continue to appear for about 3 or 4 days. The spots will dry up and scab over before falling off. Usually this disease is more serious in adults than in children.

## **How is chickenpox spread?**

Chickenpox is easily spread from person-to-person by airborne droplets from the nose or throat of an infected person. Contact with the fluid from the lesions may also spread the disease. Another way to get chickenpox is by touching articles that are freshly soiled by the infected person's chickenpox lesions.

## **How long are people contagious?**

A person is probably the most contagious 1 to 2 days before the rash appears and for as long as five days after the rash begins. Once all the lesions scab or crust, the person can no longer spread the disease.

## **Who gets chickenpox?**

Anyone can get chickenpox, but those who are not vaccinated are at greater risk. Chickenpox usually results in lifelong immunity. However, this infection may remain hidden and recur years later as herpes zoster (shingles) in some older adults and sometimes in children.

## **What treatment is available for people with chickenpox?**

In healthy children, chickenpox is usually a mild disease. Treatment for children is usually aimed at reducing itch and discomfort. In persons with weakened immune systems or pregnant women, the disease can be more severe. These people should see their doctor if they were exposed to chickenpox or become sick with chickenpox. If a woman gets chickenpox when she is pregnant, it could be dangerous for the baby.

## **Do infected people need to be kept home from school, work or daycare?**

Persons with chickenpox should stay home for five days after the beginning of the chickenpox rash or until all the lesions become dry (usually 5-6 days). Special care should be taken not to expose pregnant women or persons with weak immune systems to chickenpox.

## **How can I protect myself and my family from getting chickenpox?**

- Make certain your children are up to date on their vaccines.
- Wash hands frequently with water and soap. (Sanitizing gel may be substituted when hands are not visibly soiled.)