

Chickenpox (Varicella)

Diagnosing Chickenpox

- Chickenpox is characterized by a rash which is very itchy and progresses through 4 stages: multiple small red bumps which progress to small water blisters; these progress to open sores which gradually dry and form brown crusts.
- The rash usually starts on the trunk and then spreads to the face, scalp and the arms and legs. Some sores may develop in the mouth, eyelids and genital area.
- In the 24 hours before the rash appears, your child may complain of not feeling well, have a poor appetite and have a slight fever.
- Chickenpox usually lasts 5-7 days. New skin eruptions occur every day for 4-5 days. Fever is usually highest on the 3rd or 4th day of the rash. The child will start to feel better and have less or no fever once new sores stop developing.

When is Chickenpox contagious? How is it spread?

- Children are contagious from 2 days prior to the appearance of the rash, until all the lesions have crusted over, usually 6-7 days after the rash first appears.
- Chickenpox is spread primarily through the air, but also by direct contact.
- A child may develop chickenpox 7-21 days (the incubation period) after contact with the disease.
- Children may return to daycare or school as soon as they are feeling well and are free of fever.
- Varicella vaccine is available and recommended for children one year and older.
- You cannot get shingles from a person who has chickenpox.
- Although possible, it is very unusual to get chickenpox twice.

Home care advice

- It is important to prevent your child from scratching the lesions as this may lead to severe infections and / or scarring.
- Bathe in a cool bath as often as needed. You can add baking soda, starch or oatmeal, 2 oz per tub.
- Apply calamine lotion or cool compresses to the lesions. Do NOT use Caladryl.
- If the itching becomes severe or interferes with sleep, give oral Benadryl. You should discuss the dose of Benadryl with your physician, as the dose indicated on the bottle may not provide adequate anti-itch effects.
- Fingernails should be trimmed. Consider using mittens at night.
- Washing with soap will not spread the virus and may decrease chance of infection.
- Give acetaminophen (Tylenol, Tempra) for fever and/or discomfort.
- Ibuprofen is generally not recommended as it may be associated with an increased risk of skin infections.
- DO NOT give Aspirin (ASA). It may cause Reye's syndrome, a severe illness that damages the liver and the brain.
- If your child has difficulty eating due to chickenpox in the mouth, offer cool fluids and a soft diet.

You should see your doctor if:

- Signs of infection (redness or swelling) develop around the blisters.
- Other symptoms are present (High fever, headache, coughing, earache, or vomiting more than 3 times)
- Your child becomes confused, lethargic (difficult to awaken), or develops trouble walking.
- Your child is taking steroids (ex; Prednisone) • Your child is less than 6 months old.
- Chickenpox in the eyes.

(Sources: Montreal Children's Hospital, Children's Care Clinic)

Important

The information contained herein, is intended as a guideline and is for educational purposes only. you are concerned about the well-being of your child, you should seek a medical opinion either at our office, or at the emergency room of your nearest hospital or the Montreal Children's Hospital.