

Chickenpox

Information for parents



Specialist Support

If you require this leaflet in another language, large print or another format, please contact the Health Information Centre Tel: (023) 9228 6757, who will advise you.



What is chicken pox?

Chickenpox (medically known as Varicella) is a common and mild illness caused by a virus called Varicella-Zoster. Most people will have chickenpox at some point in their lives, most commonly throughout childhood.

Chickenpox is highly contagious and spreads through the coughs and sneezes of someone who is infected.

Signs and Symptoms

- Before the rash appears your child may seem unwell and have a temperature
- Chickenpox causes an itchy rash consisting of small raised blisters. Some children will have lots of spots, most commonly on face, arms, legs chest, stomach and scalp. They may also be found inside the mouth and nose and sometimes on genitals
- After a few days the blisters will start to scab over, but new blisters may still appear. Some children will only have a few spots others will have them widespread
- When the blisters begin to scab over, the rash may become extremely itchy. In most children the blisters will crust over and fall off naturally within two weeks

Most children with chickenpox can be cared for at home following the advice below. However in some cases children can become very unwell. You should contact your GP should your child develop any unusual symptoms; ie;

- if the blisters have become infected
- if your child has a pain in their chest or has difficulty breathing

If you are at all concerned about your child seek medical attention from your GP.

Care at home

- Chickenpox is a mild illness, but expect your child to feel miserable while they have it
- Your child is like to have a fever for at least the first few days and the spots can be extremely itchy
- There are no specific treatments for chickenpox, but there are remedies which can help alleviate symptoms
- Paracetamol and or Ibuprofen will help relieve fever and calamine lotion and cooling gels to ease itching
- Encourage regular cool fluids to help keep your child hydrated. Ice lollies are a good way of getting fluids into your child they also will help soothe a mouth with chicken pox in it
- Stop the scratching. This is important as it will reduce scarring. Cool, loose clothing is best to help reduce any fever and to help prevent their skin from becoming sore and aggravated. Calamine lotion, moisturiser or cooling gels can help soothe dry itchy skin available from pharmacies.
- Keep fingernails short. You can use socks over your child's hands to stop scratching at night
- A stronger medicine called Chlorphenamine (Piriton) can also be used to help reduce itching this can be purchased over the counter from pharmacies. Chlorphenamine is taken by mouth and is suitable for children over one year

Please do not give your child aspirin if you suspect or know that they have chickenpox. Giving aspirin to a child with chickenpox can cause them to develop a life threatening complication called Reye's Syndrome which can cause severe brain and liver damage.

When to seek further medical assistance

- If your child is less than four weeks old
- If you are not sure your child has chickenpox
- If your child has a temperature above 39°C
- If the skin surrounding your child's chickenpox becomes red sore and appears to be infected
- If your child has pain in their chest or has difficulty breathing
- If your child is not managing sufficient oral fluids and passing urine
- severe headache
- sensitivity to light (called photophobia, which means light hurts your eyes)
- nausea and vomiting
- stiff neck
- confusion
- sleepiness, difficulty waking, or unconsciousness
- convulsions (seizures)

Who is at Special Risk?

- Pregnant women
- Newborn babies
- People with weakened immune systems

These people should seek medical advice as soon as they are exposed to the virus.

Hospital Treatment

Most cases of chickenpox will be successfully treated at home. However on occasion, hospital treatment may be necessary. If your child needs to be admitted to hospital the doctors will explain other treatments that may be needed. These may include;

- Antiviral medication (Aciclovir)
- Immunoglobulins – given via drip. It is not used to treat chickenpox but to protect people who are at high risk of developing a severe chickenpox infection eg: newborn babies and those with weakened immune systems

When can my child go home?

Your child will be discharged when medical staff are happy that he or she is managing with any remaining symptoms.

If you become worried about your child when you return home you can:

- If you have been given Open Access use the number provided on your discharge letter to call for advice
- See your GP
- Call 111 for advice
- Go to your local Emergency Department

Consent - What does this mean?

Before any health professional examines or treats you they must have **your consent or permission**. Consent may be implied (e.g. offering a wrist for taking a pulse) or written (where you sign a form agreeing the treatment/operation).

Young people are presumed to be able to give consent depending on their maturity and the nature of the decision. Where a child is not competent to give consent, only a person (or body) with parental responsibility may consent on the child's behalf. More detailed information is available www.dh.gov.uk

Information we hold about you and your rights under the Data Protection Act

Please refer to the booklet 'Your Healthcare Information – Your Rights! Our Responsibilities!' for further guidance.

How to comment on your treatment

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer your questions. However, if you have any concerns you can also contact the Patient Experience Service on 0800 917 6039 or E-mail patientexperience@porthosp.nhs.uk

Author: S Goodson & T Rumbold
Produced: July 2013
Review: July 2015
Ref: Pae/062
Medical Illustration ref: 13/3434
©Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust

Produced by
Medical Photography
& Illustration
mpandi@porthosp.nhs.uk

The logo for Medical Photography & Illustration (mp+i) is located in the bottom right corner. It consists of the lowercase letters 'mp+i' in a white, sans-serif font, set against a solid black square background.