

Chickenpox (Varicella) Quicksheet

December 2025



Background

Chickenpox is a childhood illness that causes a blister-like rash, itching and fever. Chickenpox is caused by the varicella-zoster virus (VZV). VZV can also cause shingles.

After you have recovered from varicella, your body does not rid itself of the varicella-zoster virus. Instead, the virus remains dormant in your body, specifically in your nerves. The virus can then reactivate later in life, causing shingles.

Symptoms

- Rash: itchy, blister-like
- Fever
- Runny nose
- Cough
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Dehydration

The rash appears first on the face, chest and back, but it can spread over the entire body, including the eyelids, inside of the mouth or genital area.

There are usually between 250 and 500 itchy blisters.

How Varicella Spreads

Chickenpox is spread from person-to-person by airborne droplets and direct contact with infected secretions.

Pregnant persons who become infected with varicella can pass the virus along to their unborn baby

A person with chickenpox is contagious one to two days before the rash appears and remains contagious until all blisters have formed scabs.

It takes from 10 to 21 days after contact with an infected person for someone to develop chickenpox.

Who Is at Risk?

People most likely to get chickenpox or have serious complications include:

Most at risk of getting chickenpox

- Anyone who is not vaccinated
- People who never had chickenpox

Most at risk of severe illness or complications

- Infants
- Adolescents
- Adults
- Pregnant women
- People with weakened immune systems

Prevention

Make sure you are up-to-date with the Varicella vaccine

- First dose: age 12 through 15 months
- Second dose: age 4 through 6 years

Older children, adolescents, and adults who are not already immune to chickenpox should also receive 2 doses of the vaccine

Additional Prevention Measures

- Isolate sick individuals
- Practice good hand hygiene
- Cover mouth and nose when coughing/sneezing

When to Stay Home

Individuals with chickenpox should stay home and avoid school, work, childcare, and group activities when:

- Rash is present and blisters have not yet scabbed over
- They have a fever
- They are still contagious, which lasts from:
 - 1-2 days before the rash appears, until all blisters have formed scabs

