

# Fact Sheet

## Chickenpox (Varicella)

### What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox (varicella) is a disease caused by a virus. Chickenpox is common for children and is usually a mild disease. But it can be serious for babies, adults, pregnant women, and people with weak immune systems.

### What are the symptoms?

Chickenpox causes a rash of itchy blisters that starts on the face, chest, back and stomach. A person can have up to hundreds of blisters that can spread all over the body, even inside the mouth. Chickenpox also causes fever, headache, and tiredness. People with chickenpox are usually sick for 5 to 10 days.

### How is it spread?

The chickenpox virus is found in the nose and throat and in the blisters on the skin. It spreads by direct contact with infected fluids from these areas. Chickenpox also spreads through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

### Who is at risk?

Children most often get chickenpox; but anyone who has never had the disease before is at risk. If a pregnant woman has chickenpox, her unborn baby may be at risk.

### What is the treatment?

There is no treatment for chickenpox and most people can get better at home. People who get seriously sick should contact their health care provider.

Children or adolescents with chickenpox should NOT be given ASA or aspirin, because it can increase the risk of Reye's syndrome (a rare but serious illness that can affect the brain and liver).

### How can it be prevented?

- There is a vaccine available that can prevent chickenpox. Ask your health care provider if you are eligible.
- Hand washing is the best way to prevent all types of infection. Hand washing after coughing and sneezing, before and after caring for a sick person, and keeping your fingernails short will help prevent the spread of germs.
- Try not to share food, drinks, cigarettes or eating utensils, and toothbrushes.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your elbow.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- People sick with chicken pox should not visit people with weak immune systems and pregnant women who have not had chickenpox or have not had the chickenpox vaccine until the blisters have healed.