



Infection Prevention & Control Team

Chickenpox

Information for parents & carers

Introduction

This leaflet aims to provide parents and carers with information about Chickenpox.

What is Chickenpox?

Chickenpox is an infection caused by the Varicella Zoster virus, which is part of the Herpes group of viruses. Anyone can catch chickenpox, but it mainly affects children under 10.

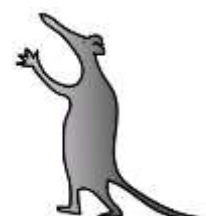
Most people will have had chickenpox by the age of 15. Chickenpox is most common in late winter and spring and is extremely infectious. If there is an outbreak at your child's nursery or school, it is likely that your child will get it too.

Chickenpox is at its most infectious in the day or two before the rash appears. It remains infectious until the blisters have dried up, which usually takes about five days from the time they first appear. It is recommended that you keep your child away from school or nursery for at least five days from the time spots first appear.

Once the symptoms have cleared up, the virus stays dormant in the body but does not cause any symptoms or affect your child's health. However, at a later time the virus can reactivate and cause shingles.

What are the signs and symptoms of Chickenpox?

- Spots
- Fever
- Sore throat
- Dry cough



Your child may have a fever and feel generally unwell for a few days before the spots appear. Spots appear in groups; they develop into small fluid-filled blisters and are itchy. The spots usually start on the head or face and then spread to the body and then arms and legs. Eventually they can be anywhere on the body.

The spots then crust over and form scabs that will fall off after a few days. Some children may be covered in spots, others only have a few.

How does Chickenpox spread?

Chickenpox is very infectious. The virus spreads from person to person through the air in the fine spray of saliva or mucous droplets when you cough or sneeze. It can also be passed from person to person through contact with the fluid from chickenpox blisters, either from a person who is infected, or by items such as clothing that have been in contact with broken blisters.



What treatment(s) are available?

Most people with chickenpox get better without any treatment. However, over-the-counter treatments are available to help relieve your child's symptoms (e.g. paracetamol). Some children have a higher risk of developing complications from chickenpox. They may need extra treatment such as an antiviral medicine.

What complications may develop as a result of catching Chickenpox?

Chickenpox is normally a mild disease but it can be serious in immunocompromised patients. Serious complications include bacterial skin infections and soft tissue including group A streptococcal infections, encephalitis (swelling of the brain), hepatitis and pneumonia.

Infection during pregnancy can be serious for the mother and the unborn baby, so exposure to Chickenpox during pregnancy must be reported to the individual's GP.

Are there any implications for others i.e. infecting other people?

Chickenpox can pose a problem to seriously ill patients who may be unable to fight infection. Chickenpox can also be severe and cause complications during pregnancy. For this reason it is important to stop it from spreading among hospital patients.

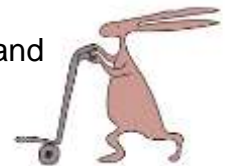
Will your child be isolated?

During the infectious period your child will be isolated in a side room with the door closed. This is to keep them away from other children who may be at risk of catching the disease. All staff will wear gloves and aprons whilst attending to your child's needs. Chickenpox is infectious from 2 days before the onset of the rash until all the spots have crusted over (provided this is more than 5 days since the rash appeared).

Can your child still have visitors?

Yes. Your child can still have visitors in hospital and at home. Pregnant women, newborn babies and people with weakened immune systems should not visit your child. This is because they are at a special risk of serious problems if they catch Chickenpox.

Also visitors that have not had chickenpox or have been in contact with your child and have symptoms should not visit.



Do I need to inform anyone?

Yes. If your child is still infectious (spots for less than 5 days) then you should warn people. For example, if your child visits your GP or the hospital again. If your child has to come back into hospital again, they may be nursed in a side room again if the spots have not crusted over.

What are the risks to other family members?

People that have not had Chickenpox may be at risk of acquiring infection. Family members concerned about the consequences of developing Chickenpox are advised to contact their GP.

Who to contact for further information or support?

The Infection Prevention and Control Team in the Hospital can also be contacted on the number below.

Infection Prevention & Control Nurses: 0151 252 5485

This leaflet only gives general information. You must always discuss the individual treatment of your child with the appropriate member of staff. Do not rely on this leaflet alone for information about your child's treatment.

This information can be made available in other languages and formats if requested.

Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust
Alder Hey
Eaton Road
Liverpool
L12 2AP

Tel: 0151 228 4811
www.alderhey.nhs.uk



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Review Date: December 2024

PIAG: 326

