



Chicken Pox – (Varicella Zoster)

PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET

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This leaflet aims to help you understand what chicken pox is, the symptoms and what treatment is required to treat this condition.

What is Chicken Pox?

Chicken pox is a common childhood illness that most children catch at some point. It causes a rash of red itchy spots that turn into fluid filled blisters. These blisters eventually crust over and fall off.

Symptoms

Your child may feel unwell before any signs of the rash. This can include:

- A headache
- High temperature of over 38c
- Aching muscles
- Reduced appetite
- Generally feeling unwell

Spots normally appear in clusters and tend to be:

- behind the ears
- on the face
- over the scalp
- on the chest and belly
- on the arms and legs

However spots can appear anywhere on the body such as inside the ears and mouth. If spots appear in the eyes please seek medical attention urgently.

New spots can keep appearing in waves for three to five days after the rash begins. Therefore, different clusters of spots may be at different stages of blistering or drying out.

Unusual Symptoms

- The skin surrounding the rash becomes red, hot and painful
- Pain in the chest or difficulty in breathing
- Signs of dehydration such as fewer wet nappies and drowsiness

If your child develops any of these unusual symptoms please seek medical attention.

Treatment

The chicken pox virus will usually clear up without treatment. But there are ways to ease your child's itching and discomfort.

Painkillers

If your child is in pain or has a high fever you can give them paracetamol which is available from pharmacies and most supermarkets. Please follow the instructions on the bottle.

It is not advisable to give Ibuprofen. This is due to a very small risk of adverse skin reactions in children with chicken pox.

Keep hydrated

It is important for children with chicken pox to drink plenty of fluids. Ice lollies are a good way of getting fluids into child especially if they have a sore mouth from chicken pox spots.

Itchiness

Chickenpox can be incredibly itchy, but it's important for children to not scratch the spots, to avoid future scarring.

One way of stopping scratching is to keep your child's fingernails clean and short. You can also put socks over your child's hands at night to stop them scratching the rash as they sleep.

If your child's skin is very itchy or sore, try using calamine lotion or cooling gels. These have a soothing, cooling effect. These are available in pharmacies.

A medicine called chlorphenamine/piriton can also help to relieve the itching. It's available from your pharmacist over the counter or it can be prescribed by your GP. Chlorphenamine is taken by mouth and is suitable for children over one year old.

Complications of Chicken Pox

Complications of chicken pox are rare in healthy children. The most common complication is where the blisters become infected with bacteria.

A sign that the [blisters](#) have become infected is when the surrounding skin becomes red and sore. If your child has these symptoms see your GP who may need to prescribe a course of antibiotics.

If you think that your child's blisters have become infected, contact your GP as the child may need a course of [antibiotics](#).

Other complications

Very rarely, chickenpox can lead to more serious complications involving the nervous system (brain and spinal cord) in children.

These include infections of the brain (encephalitis), the protective membranes around the brain (meningitis) or part of the brain called the cerebellum (cerebellitis).

Signs of these problems can include:

- a lack of energy
- drowsiness
- confusion
- seizures (fits)
- vomiting
- severe headaches
- a stiff neck
- behavioural changes
- problems with walking, balance or speech

Seek medical advice as soon as possible if your child develops any of these symptoms after having chickenpox.

Preventing the spread of Chicken Pox

Public Health England recommend that you inform their school or nursery and keep them at home for at least 5 days and until all the spots have scabbed over.

If your child has chickenpox they should avoid contact with:

- pregnant women
- newborn babies

- anyone who has a weak immune system, such as people who are having chemotherapy (a treatment for cancer) or taking steroid tablets

Useful Contact Numbers:

- Contact your GP for advice.
- Children's Unit 0161 922 5252 (24 hrs)
- Children's Community Team 0161 922 5251 (08.00-20.00 mon-sun)
- Go to Doc (GP service) 0161 785 0805 (out of hours)
- NHS Direct 111 (24hr helpline)

Useful Websites/information:

- Department of Health (www.dh.gov.uk)
- NHS Choices (www.nhs.uk/conditions)
- NHS institute for innovation and improvement (www.institute.nhs.uk)
- NHS Improvement (www.improvement.nhs.uk)

In compiling this information leaflet, a number of recognised professional bodies including the Department of Health, NHS Improvement, NHS Choices, have been used.

If you have any questions you want to ask, you can use this space to remind yourself:

References:

NHS choices (2017) – chicken Pox

If you have a visual impairment this leaflet can be made available in bigger print or on audiotape. If you require either of these options please contact the Patient Information Centre on 0161 922 5332

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