



University Health Center

Chickenpox (Varicella)

What is chickenpox (varicella) and what is chickenpox illness like?

Chickenpox is an infectious disease caused by the varicella-zoster virus which results in a blister-like rash, itching, tiredness and fever. The rash appears first on the trunk and face, but can spread over the entire body causing between 250 to 500 itchy blisters. Typically the disease has annual cycles, peaking in the spring of each year. Chickenpox most commonly causes an illness that lasts about 5-10 days. Individuals usually miss 5 or 6 days of school or work due to their chickenpox.

How do you get chickenpox?

Chickenpox is highly infectious and spreads from person to person by direct contact with the fluid from the blisters of the rash or through the air from an infected person's coughing or sneezing.

Is chickenpox serious?

Chickenpox is usually a mild disease in children but it can have serious complications the adults.

When is someone with the disease contagious?

A person with chickenpox is contagious 1-2 days before the rash appears and until all blisters have formed scabs.

From the time of exposure, how long does it take to come down with the disease?

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

I've been exposed to chickenpox, would getting the vaccine prevent me from getting the disease?

Varicella vaccination may prevent or modify chickenpox if administered up to 3 days, and possibly 5 days, after an exposure.

Can you get chickenpox more than once?

Yes, but it is uncommon to do so. For most people, one infection is thought to provide lifelong immunity.

Are there any treatments for chickenpox?

Your health care provider will advise you on options for treatment. An antiviral drug may minimize the course of the disease. In order for antivirals to be effective they must be administered within 24 hours of the onset of the chickenpox rash.

Can chickenpox be prevented?

Varicella vaccine can provide protection against acquiring the disease.

Is the vaccine always effective in preventing?

No vaccine is 100% effective in preventing disease. For chickenpox vaccine, about 8 to 9 out of every 10 people who are vaccinated are completely protected from chickenpox. The vaccine almost always prevents against severe disease. If a vaccinated person does get chickenpox, it is usually a very mild case with fewer skin lesions (usually less than 50) lasting only a few days, no fever or a low fever, and few other symptoms.

Is it safe to receive the vaccine even if you have previously had chickenpox?

Yes, it is still safe to receive the vaccine even if you have previously had chickenpox.

How important is it for adults to be vaccinated for chickenpox?

All adults who have never had chickenpox should consider vaccination. Immunity is especially important for adolescents and adults who have close contact with persons at high risk for serious complications and for those who are likely to come in close contact with children.

Is there anyone who should not receive the chickenpox vaccine?

Yes, certain persons should not receive the chickenpox vaccine. These persons are those who: ever had a serious allergic reaction to chickenpox vaccine, neomycin, or gelatin, now have a moderate or serious illness, are pregnant, have compromised immunity or live with someone with compromised immunity.

Questions?

Call University Health Center at 346-2770 or <http://www.cdc.gov/nip/diseases/varicella>