



Coping with Chickenpox

Chickenpox causes red, itchy spots that turn into fluid-filled blisters before scabbing over and dropping off. Some children have just a few spots while others may be covered from head to foot. If your child has only a few spots you might need your doctor to confirm the diagnosis.

- Your child is contagious from 1 to 2 days before their spots appear. Chickenpox has a fairly long incubation period – between 10-21 days – so your child may not show symptoms for up to 3 weeks after coming into contact with the virus. They are infectious until all their spots have crusted over.
- Most children are generally unwell in the few days before their spots appear. They'll have a fever, may lose their appetite and will seem generally under the weather and a bit irritable. You can ease your child's symptoms with regular doses of infant paracetamol.

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For additional fact sheets see www.ihv.org.uk

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The Start4Life Information Service for Parents provides free information and advice. Find out more at: bit.ly/1iC4rrO

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- If your child has no other health concerns and you're certain they have chickenpox there's no need to see a GP. However, if you have any doubt, or your child becomes more unwell, it's important to get your GP or Health Visitor's advice as soon as possible. While complications from chickenpox are rare, spots can become infected which requires additional treatment.
- You should see your GP immediately if your child complains of a pain in their chest or has difficulty breathing.
- Babies are at higher risk of developing complications from chickenpox so if you suspect your baby has the illness or has been in close contact with someone with chickenpox (a brother or sister, for example) you should get advice from your Health Visitor or GP.
- There are no prescription medicines that can treat chickenpox, due to the viral nature of the illness, but regular doses of infant paracetamol can help ease your child's fever and make them feel a little more comfortable. NEVER give your child aspirin if you think or know that they have chickenpox – aspirin can cause a potentially fatal condition called Reye's Syndrome if used to treat a child with chickenpox.
- Your little one may find it difficult to cope with the itchiness caused by their chickenpox, and it may make it difficult for them to sleep at night. Applying calamine lotion (available from your local chemist) helps to soothe and cool itchy skin. Dressing in loose-fitting clothes can be helpful, too, and if your child is scratching at their spots while they sleep you could try putting socks over their hands and making sure they are not too hot.
- A medicine called chlorphenamine can help to relieve the itching caused by chickenpox and is suitable for children aged 1 year and over. It can be prescribed by your GP or you can buy it from the chemist. Stronger medicines are only usually prescribed for those particularly vulnerable to complications from chickenpox, such as newborn babies and pregnant women.
- Keep your child home from school or nursery until the last spot has scabbed over – this is usually around 5 days after their chickenpox appeared. Avoid playdates and playgroups so you can minimise the spread to other children.
- Pregnant women are at risk of developing complications in their pregnancy if they come into contact with chickenpox. If you're pregnant and your child has chickenpox (or you think you may have come into contact with the illness some other way) it's important to speak to your Midwife or GP urgently. You will probably have immunity to chickenpox but you should speak to your GP so they can arrange blood test to check this, and arrange for any other necessary treatment or monitoring.

More information:

The NHS Choices website has comprehensive information on chickenpox here:

bit.ly/1yGB0iL