

# Chicken Pox

## *Basic Information*

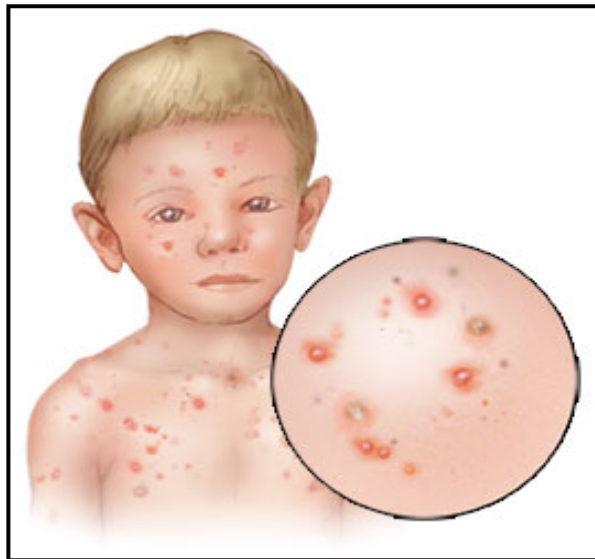
Chickenpox is a common illness among kids, particularly those under age 12. An itchy rash of spots that look like blisters can appear all over the body and may be accompanied by flu-like symptoms. Symptoms usually go away without treatment, but because the infection is very contagious, an infected person should be isolated & should rest until the symptoms are gone.

Chickenpox is caused by the **Varicella-Zoster Virus (VZV)**. Chickenpox is rarely fatal, although it is generally more severe in adults than in children.

A person usually has only one episode of chickenpox, but VZV can lie dormant within the body and cause a different type of skin eruption later in life called shingles (or herpes zoster). Getting the chickenpox vaccine significantly lowers the chances of getting chickenpox, but he or she may still develop shingles later.

## *Sign and Symptoms of Chickenpox*

Chickenpox causes a red, itchy rash on the skin that usually appears first on the abdomen or back and face, and then spreads to almost everywhere else on the body, including the scalp, mouth, nose, ears & genitals.



The rash begins as multiple small, red bumps that look like pimples or insect bites. They develop into thin-walled blisters filled with clear fluid, which becomes cloudy. The blister wall breaks, leaving open sores, which finally crust over to become dry, brown scabs.

Chickenpox blisters are usually less than a quarter of an inch wide, have a reddish base, and appear in bouts over 2 to 4 days. Chickenpox has a 10-21 day incubation period

Some persons have a fever, abdominal pain, sore throat, headache, or a vague sick feeling a day or 2 before the rash appears. These symptoms may last for a few days, and fever stays in the range of 100°–102° Fahrenheit (37.7°–38.8° Celsius), though in rare cases may be higher.

### *Contagiousness*

Chickenpox is a highly contagious disease that spreads from person to person by direct contact or through the air from an infected person's coughing or sneezing. Touching or direct contact with the fluid (secretion) from a chickenpox blister can also spread the disease.

A person with chickenpox is contagious from one to two days before the rash appears until all blisters have formed scabs. A person with chickenpox should be kept isolated until all blisters have dried. (about 1 week). It takes from 10-21 days after contact with an infected person for someone to develop chickenpox.

To help keep the virus from spreading, cleanliness & good hygiene is essential. Ship's staff should wash their hands with anti bacterial soap, especially after coming into contact with the infected person & before meals.

### *Preventing Chicken Pox*

Doctors recommend that kids receive the chickenpox vaccine when they are 12 to 15 months old and a booster shot at 4 to 6 years old. The vaccine is about 70% to 85% effective at preventing mild infection, and more than 95% effective in preventing moderate to severe forms of the infection.

Healthy children who have had chickenpox do not need the vaccine — they usually have lifelong protection against the illness.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommended that people 13 years of age and older who have never had chickenpox or received chickenpox vaccine get two doses of the varicella vaccine at least 28 days apart

### *Treating Chickenpox*

A virus causes chickenpox, so the doctor won't prescribe antibiotics. However, antibiotics may be required if the sores become infected by bacteria (due to scratching the blisters).

The antiviral medicine acyclovir may be prescribed for people with chickenpox who are at risk for complications. The drug, which can make the infection less severe, must be given within the first 24 hours after the rash appears. Acyclovir can have significant side effects, so it is only given when necessary.

### *Dealing with the Discomfort of Chickenpox*

You can help relieve the itchiness, fever, and discomfort of chickenpox by:

- Using cool wet compresses or giving baths in cool or lukewarm water every 3 to 4 hours for the first few days. Oatmeal baths, available at the supermarket or pharmacy, can help to relieve itching. (Baths do not spread chickenpox.)
- Patting (not rubbing) the body dry.

- Putting calamine lotion on itchy areas (but don't use it on the face, especially near the eyes).
- Giving foods that are cold, soft, and bland because chickenpox in the mouth may make drinking or eating difficult. Avoid feeding the person anything highly acidic or especially salty, like orange juice or pretzels.

