



About Chicken Pox

Chicken Pox, also known as Varicella, is an acute and highly contagious disease. The viral infection is transferred from one person to another through direct contact with the broken chickenpox blisters and through airborne droplets. People who have never had chickenpox can get infected just by being in a room with someone who has the disease. There is universal susceptibility to the virus in those not previously infected.

This viral disease is characterized by dry itching (pruritus) and a skin rash with fluid-filled blisters that burst and form crusts. The onset of the chickenpox rash may be preceded by a day of mild fever and weakness. The infectious period lasts from about three days before the rash appears until all the blisters have formed scabs. The incubation period between being infected with chickenpox until the disease breaks out and symptoms appear is 10 to 21 days.

Most children have been infected with the virus by the age of 10. After infection, lifelong immunity against recurrent infection is usually present. However, a person with a history of chickenpox may develop shingles (herpeszoster) later in life. In India, it usually occurs in the first six months of the year.

What are the symptoms of Chicken Pox?

- Achiness and fever (before the disease breaks out).
- Fatigue, irritability and sore throat.
- Rashes break out on the day the fever starts.
- A skin rash or lesion on the chest, back, shoulders, scalp, or other areas.
- Lesions on the mouth, vagina, rectum, eye, or other mucus membranes.
- Itchy, blistering rash develops into as many as 250-500 blisters within couple of hours.
- Crusting, after the blister breaks, occurs after two to four days.
- Crusts become progressively darker with time and form scale like structure called scab. Scabs fall off in about nine to 13 days.

These symptoms are mild in young children. Chickenpox lasts seven to ten days in children and longer in adults. Adults can feel very ill and take longer to recover. They are also more likely than children to suffer complications.

How can Chicken Pox be treated?

Isolation of the patient for about 6 days after the onset of rashes and disinfecting the articles soiled by nose and throat discharge of the patient are the usual control measures.

The treatment mostly consists of easing the symptoms.

Remember that infected person will be contagious until all the blisters have scabs and when new blisters have stopped appearing. They should stay at home while they are infectious.

Avoid scratching the blisters because of the risk of infection. Cut the nails short or make the patient wear gloves.

Pay attention to personal hygiene.

Calamine lotion will help to relieve the itching.

Keep the patient in cold surroundings as heat and sweat may make the itching worse.

In attacks of chickenpox where the itching is so serious that the child's sleep is totally disturbed, antihistamine medications with a heavily sedative effect can be used. Antihistamines are medication for allergic reactions, motion sickness or insomnia.

Future prospects

Once a person has had chickenpox, they will have immunity to the disease for the rest of their life. However, the virus may return later in life as shingles. A person who has active shingles can infect others with chickenpox, but cannot give shingles to someone else.