Chickenpox: What You Need to Know

Chickenpox is a common disease in children that caused red, itchy bumps on the body. In this handout, you will learn about chickenpox, including its causes and symptoms. You will also learn how to prevent your child from getting chickenpox.

WHAT IS CHICKENPOX?
Chickenpox (also called varicella) is a contagious disease that causes fever, tiredness and a blistering, red and itchy rash. Contagious means a disease can spread from one person to another.

HOW LONG IS MY CHILD CONTAGIOUS FOR?
Chickenpox is contagious until your child’s fever is gone and the rash has formed scabs. Most children who have chickenpox will not have the disease again later in life.

There is a time called the incubation period when a person might be contagious, but does not have symptoms yet. The incubation period for chickenpox is 1-3 weeks.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF CHICKENPOX?
The symptoms of chickenpox include:

- Fever
- Itchy, red and blistered rash (usually first appears on the chest or back, then on the arms, legs and face)

HOW DO DOCTORS TREAT CHICKENPOX?
In most cases, chickenpox will get better on its own. The care team can recommend different creams or lotions to relieve any itching. They can also recommend medications to help lower your child’s fever.

In babies and in children with certain medical conditions, doctors might prescribe antiviral medications (medications that help protect against the chickenpox virus, or germ).

HOW CAN I PREVENT MY CHILD FROM GETTING CHICKENPOX?
To prevent your child from getting chickenpox, they can get the chickenpox vaccine. Doctors usually give the chickenpox vaccine to all children ages 12-18 months and again at ages 4-6.

Watch a video on chickenpox from Pediatric Primary Care at MGHfC.
Video courtesy of Vidscrip®.
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