

## Infections - viral



# Chicken Pox

## Important points

- Chicken pox is a viral infection with fever and skin spots
- Skin spots are mostly seen on the central body, head and neck
- The child is infectious for about 7 days, 2 days before until 5 days after the rash first appears
- Children need to be kept away from school, kindergarten or child care until all the skin spots have crusted over
- Dry scabs are not infectious
- Treatment is used to help the symptoms or prevent secondary bacterial infection in the spots

## What is it?

Chicken pox is a common infection caused by a virus (varicella-zoster). The child may be unwell for a day or two with fever, then redness in the skin followed by widespread groups of small red bumps (purple or brown in coloured skin) which over the next 2-4 days become blisters. The blisters become white with pus for several days and then dry to a dark scab.

The spots are most common on the central part of the body, head and neck and less common on the arms and legs. The number of spots can vary.

Children aged 2-10 years are most commonly affected. The fever and rash appear about two weeks after contact with an infected person. Chicken pox is infectious from 2 days before the rash appears until 5 days after it first appears. The dried scabs are not infectious. Once a person has had chicken pox, there is long lasting immunity and a second attack is unlikely.

## How is it prevented?

To prevent infecting others, children need to be kept away from school, kindergarten or child care until all the skin spots have crusted over. Although they are not part of the routine immunisation program, vaccines for chicken pox are available. These are given in one dose to children over the age of 12 months.

**How is it treated?**

Most children with chicken pox do not need any special anti-viral treatment. Treatment is used to control the fever and prevent secondary bacterial infection of the skin spots. If bacterial infection does occur, then it may result in scars. Bath oils that are both antibacterial and anti-itch may help. Antiseptics may be used on the skin spots to prevent secondary bacterial infection.

**Further information**

Your Maternal and Child Health nurse.

Your pharmacist.

Your family doctor.

A dermatologist.

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