

Note: ibuprofen has been used with paracetamol in the past. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has recommended that ibuprofen no longer be used for chickenpox. This is because some studies suggested that there may be an association with more severe skin reactions if ibuprofen is used for chickenpox. While more evidence is awaited, the advice is to avoid ibuprofen in this situation.

Vaccination for chickenpox is only available for those people who are most at risk. This includes those with a severely weakened immune system, especially children with Leukaemia or who have had organ transplants. Currently vaccine is not available for general use.

For more information on **Chickenpox** contact:

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The Office of the
**Committee for
Health & Social Care**

Chickenpox



Information Leaflet

What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is an infection caused by the varicella-zoster virus. Most children have chickenpox at some stage. Most commonly, children get chickenpox before the age of 10 years.

Adults and older children can be affected, but over 90% of people will have acquired natural immunity by the time they are young adults. Immunity is usually life-long so it is rare to get a second attack of chickenpox.

Note: you can catch chickenpox from being exposed to a person with shingles if you have not had chickenpox yourself. However, you cannot catch shingles from a person with chickenpox, you **cannot** develop shingles from contact with someone who has chickenpox.

Chickenpox symptoms

- High temperature (fever), aches and headache often start a day or so before a rash appears.
- Spots (rash) – Spots appear in crops. They develop into small blisters and are itchy. They can be anywhere on the body. Several crops may develop over several days. Some children may be covered in spots; others have only a few or even none. The rash starts off looking like red spots, which then blister, and then scab over.
- Loss of appetite or feeding problems

Some children feel quite unwell for a few days, others appear only mildly ill. Most children are much better within a week. The blisters dry up and scab, they gradually fade but may take up to two weeks to go completely.

How do you catch chickenpox?

A person with chickenpox is very infectious. The virus spreads in the air from person to person. It takes between 7 and 21 days (most commonly 10-14 days) to develop symptoms after catching the virus

(the incubation period). A person with chickenpox is infectious from two days before the spots appear until they have all crusted over (about five days after the onset of the rash).

Protecting others

Child with chickenpox should stay off school or nursery for five days from the onset of the rash and until all lesions have crusted. Also, whilst infectious, they should keep away from at-risk people who may develop a severe illness if they get chickenpox. These include:

- Infants within first four weeks of life
- Adults and pregnant women who have never had chickenpox
- People who have poor immune systems

What is the treatment for chickenpox?

There is no specific treatment for chickenpox. It is a viral infection that will therefore not respond to antibiotics. Treatment should be based on reducing symptoms such as fever and itchiness.

Dealing with a fever. A fever commonly occurs in chickenpox, and may make your child feel uncomfortable and irritable. The following are things that you can do that may bring the temperature down and make your child feel more comfortable.

You can give paracetamol to lower a temperature. You can buy paracetamol in liquid form, or as melt-in-the-mouth tablets, for children. It comes in various brand names. The dose for each age is given with the medicine packet.

Note: paracetamol does not treat the cause of the fever. It merely helps to ease discomfort. It also eases headaches, and aches and pains. You do not need to use paracetamol if your child is comfortable and not distressed by the fever, aches or pains.