

## Chickenpox Fact Sheet

1. **What is chickenpox?** - Chickenpox is an infectious disease caused by the Varicella-Zoster virus which results in a blister-like rash, itching, tiredness and fever. The rash appears first on the face, chest and back, but can spread over the entire body including inside of the mouth, eyelids, or genital area. Prior to the common use of the Varicella vaccine, most cases of chickenpox occurred in persons younger than 15 years old and the disease had annual cycles, peaking in the spring of each year.
2. **How do you get chickenpox?** Chickenpox is highly infectious and spreads from person to person by direct contact or through the air from an infected person's coughing or sneezing. A person with chickenpox is contagious 1 to 2 days before the rash appears and until all blisters have formed scabs. It takes from 10 to 21 days after contact with an infected person for someone to develop chickenpox.
3. **Can Chickenpox be prevented?** Yes, vaccination with recommended two doses of Varicella vaccine prevents chickenpox in most people.
4. **Can you get chickenpox if you've been vaccinated?** Yes. Some people who are vaccinated against chickenpox may still get the disease. However, it is usually milder with fewer blisters and little or no fever.
5. **What is the chickenpox illness like?** In unvaccinated children, chickenpox most commonly causes an illness that lasts about 5 to 10 days. Children usually miss 5 or 6 days of school or childcare due to their chickenpox and have symptoms such as high fever, severe itching, an uncomfortable rash, and dehydration or headache. Certain groups of persons are more likely to have more serious illness with complications. These include adults, infants, adolescents, pregnant women and people with weak immune systems from either illnesses or from medications such as long-term steroids.
6. **What are the serious complications from chickenpox?** Serious complications from chickenpox include bacterial infections which can involve many sites of the body including the skin, tissues under the skin, bone, lungs (pneumonia), joints and the blood. Other serious complications are due directly to the virus infection and include viral pneumonia, bleeding problems and infection of the brain (encephalitis).
7. **Can a healthy person with chickenpox die from the disease?** – Yes. Prior to the common use of the Varicella vaccine, an average of 4 million people would contract the disease each year resulting in 10,500 to 13,000 hospitalized cases and 100 to 150 deaths annually. . Some deaths from chickenpox continue to occur in healthy, unvaccinated children and adults. Many of the healthy adults who died from chickenpox contracted the disease from their unvaccinated children.
8. **Can you get chickenpox more than once?** - Yes, but this occurs uncommonly. For most people, one infection is thought to produce lifelong immunity.

9. **If chickenpox in children is usually not serious, why not let children get the disease?** It is not possible to predict who will have a mild case of chickenpox and who will have a serious or even deadly case of the disease. Now that there is a safe and effective vaccine, it is just not worth taking the chance.
  
10. **For more information about Chickenpox:**  
<http://www.cdc.gov/chickenpox/about/index.html> and  
<http://www.cdc.gov/chickenpox/vaccination.html>

This fact sheet provides general information. Please contact your physician for specific clinical information.