

# CHICKENPOX in children

Chickenpox is a common illness in children. Symptoms are seen 1 to 3 weeks after becoming infected with the chickenpox virus.



At first, children feel run down. They may have a high temperature, aches or a headache. After about a day, small red spots appear, often starting on the face or chest but they can be anywhere on the body. The spots will form itchy blisters over the next few hours or the following day. A few days later, the blisters will scab over to form a crust. The scabs will fall off by themselves after 1 or 2 weeks.

Children with chickenpox may feel quite ill for a few days. Most will feel better within a week.

## How can I treat chickenpox?

Chickenpox is usually mild and gets better on its own, but it can be very itchy. Scratching the spots can cause scarring and the skin may become infected with bacteria. Treatment can help to relieve the symptoms.

If your child is 3 months old or more, you can give them **paracetamol** liquid. This can bring their temperature down and make them feel more comfortable. Paracetamol comes in a range of strengths, so use the measuring device that comes with the medicine. Check you are using the right dose for your child's age and leave 4 to 6 hours before giving them another dose. Do not give them more than 4 doses in 24 hours.

**Don't give your child ibuprofen liquid or tablets because ibuprofen can sometimes make people with chickenpox very ill.**

If your child is 1 year or older, you can give them **chlorphenamine** liquid. This can help them to sleep if itching is a problem. Using the correct amount for your child's age give them a dose at bedtime. Before you give your child chlorphenamine let your pharmacist know if your child is taking any other medicines or has any other health problems.

Moisturising creams, cooling gels and calamine lotion may help with itching.

## What else can help your child?

- drinking plenty of water
- keeping their fingernails short and clean

- taking cool or lukewarm baths – pat the skin dry afterwards, do not rub
- wearing clothes made of smooth cotton
- wearing clothes that are warm enough, but not too hot.

## Do I need to see my doctor?

Contact your doctor if you are not sure whether your child has chickenpox, or if your child:

- is 4 weeks old or younger
- has symptoms that have not improved after 6 days
- seems to be very unwell and is getting worse
- has red or painful skin around their chickenpox spots
- is not breathing easily
- is weak and wobbly on their feet
- is drowsy
- can't drink or is dehydrated (weeing less, with less energy than usual, breathing fast, appearing confused, cold hands or feet, and skin that doesn't go back to its normal shape quickly when it is pinched gently and let go).

## Can my child give chickenpox to other people?

Yes, your child can infect other people from 1 to 2 days before their own rash appears until all their blisters have scabbed over, usually about 5 to 6 days after the rash first appears. Chickenpox is spread by coughing and sneezing and through the liquid found in chickenpox blisters. Your child should stay away from school or nursery until the last blister has scabbed over. If your child is due to travel by aeroplane in the near future, call the airline to check whether your child will be allowed to fly.

You can catch chickenpox by being in the same room as someone who has chickenpox for more than 15 minutes, or by talking to them face-to-face. Most people who have had chickenpox will not catch it again.

Chickenpox can have serious effects in pregnant women and babies less than 4 weeks old, and in people who have a weakened immune system from cancer therapy, steroid therapy or other medicines or conditions. Your child should avoid contact with anyone who may fall into one of these categories.

## Can someone catch shingles from a child with chickenpox?

No, they can't catch shingles from a child with chickenpox. You can catch chickenpox from someone with shingles if you haven't had chickenpox before. After you have had chickenpox the virus stays in your body. If your immune system is low then this can trigger an attack of shingles.

Shingles is painful and you may have a rash that develops into itching blisters that look like chickenpox. If you think you or child may have shingles then see your doctor.

## Where can I find further information?

NHS Direct Wales: [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk)

NHS Direct Wales Tel: 0845 4647 (open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Calls from landlines and mobiles cost 2p per minute, in addition to telephone providers access charge.