Infectious Disease Fact Sheet

Facts About Chicken Pox

Chicken pox, caused by the varicella virus, is a very contagious illness which causes an itchy rash. The rash starts as red bumps, turns into fluid-filled blisters and then scabs over. New blisters, or vesicles, appear as others are drying up. Typically, patients have fever, headache and body aches prior to, and several days into, the illness.

Home Remedies

Home remedies to reduce the intense itching include baking soda, Aveeno oatmeal or cornstarch baths. Aveeno lotion is also recommended by some physicians. Some physicians recommend Aveeno lotion. Light, loose clothing is preferred, since increased warmth exacerbates itching. Some physicians suggest an oral antihistamine, such as Benadryl, to control the itching. Children’s fingernails should be cut short to reduce their ability to scratch and possibly cause a secondary infection.

Isolation Precautions

In the hospital, Chicken Pox/Measles Precautions should be used when caring for these patients. Patients should be placed in a private, negative pressure ventilation room. Staff and visitors who are not immune to chicken pox must not enter the room.

Most people with chicken pox stay home. They should remain at home until all blisters are scabbed over and dry, usually about one week. Going out in public while still infectious may expose others and could cause life-threatening disease in an immunocompromised individual.

Attention!

The following situations require a visit to the doctor:

✦ If blisters develop on the eye
✦ If the person has repeated vomiting or a change in mental status
✦ If the fever increases after the first few days of rash
✦ If an area of redness begins to spread around an individual pox or blister

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Chicken Pox

Transmission

Chicken Pox is spread by inhaling respiratory droplets produced when infected persons cough or sneeze and can be spread by direct contact with fluid in blisters. Transmission occurs worldwide. In fact, chicken pox is one of the most easily spread infections. The incubation period is 8-21 days after exposure, and infected people are most infectious to others 1-2 days before the rash appears.

Prophylaxis

A vaccine is now available for routine use in children and non-immune adults. A single dose of 0.5 ml SC is recommended for children aged 12 months to 12 years. Adults and teens require two doses, 4-8 weeks apart.

Shingles

A person is considered immune after having the illness. Herpes zoster, or Shingles, is a local manifestation of recurrent or reactivation varicella. Shingles occurs mainly in older adults and can be triggered by stress, exposure to sunlight or immunosuppressive therapy. Shingles usually occurs along nerve pathways and on only one side of the body. Often the person experiences pain, tingling or numbness at the site just prior to the outbreak of the blisters rash and throughout the course of illness, usually about 2-3 weeks.