

Health Tips for Parents

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Does my child have chickenpox?

Chickenpox, a common illness among children, causes a blistery rash and flu-like symptoms. Since the infection is very contagious, children should stay home until the rash and fever are gone. Symptoms usually resolve without treatment.



Chickenpox is caused by the varicella-zoster virus (VZV). Children can be protected from VZV by getting the chickenpox (varicella) vaccine. This is usually given between the ages of 12 to 15 months, with a booster shot at 4 to 6 years old. Although some children who are immunized will still get chickenpox, the symptoms are usually much milder than in unvaccinated kids.



“Chickenpox causes a red, itchy skin rash that usually appears first on the abdomen or back and face, and then spreads to almost everywhere else on the body. This includes

the scalp, mouth, nose, ears and genitals,” says Giselle Namazie, M.D., internist in UCLA’s Westlake Village office. The signature rash becomes thin-walled blisters filled with clear fluid, and appears in crops over two to four days. Once the blister wall breaks, infected areas become open sores, which crust over to become dry, brown scabs and eventually heal.

Some kids may develop a fever, abdominal pain, sore throat or a headache a day or two before the rash appears. These symptoms may last for a few days and the fever usually ranges between 100°-102° F, though in rare cases, may be higher. Parents should consult with their child’s pediatrician if they are concerned.

Dealing with discomfort

- Use cool wet compresses or bathe in cool or lukewarm water or oatmeal products every three to four hours for the first few days, to help relieve itching.
- Put calamine lotion on itchy areas (except on the face).
- Serve foods that are cold, soft and bland since mouth blisters may make drinking or eating difficult.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist about pain-relieving creams.

Tips to prevent spreading chickenpox

Chickenpox is very contagious from about two days before the rash appears until all the blisters are crusted over.

“A child with chickenpox should be kept out of school until all blisters have dried, usually about one week” advises Dr. Namazie. To help keep the virus from spreading, make sure your child washes his/her hands frequently and is kept away from others as much as possible.



This information is provided courtesy of the pediatricians at Mattel Children’s Hospital UCLA. UCLA Health System pediatricians are conveniently located in your neighborhood. In addition to our Children’s Health Center in Westwood, we have offices in Brentwood, Manhattan Beach, Santa Monica and West Los Angeles. All health and health-related information contained in this publication is intended to be general in nature and should not be used as a substitute for a visit with a healthcare professional.