



### What is chickenpox?

- *Chickenpox* (varicella) is an acute infectious disease caused by the varicella-zoster virus.
- It mainly affects children under 12 years of age although almost all persons develop lifelong immunity after infection.
- The virus may remain silent in the body and appear many years later as herpes zoster (shingles).



### What is chickenpox like?

- Patient usually presents with fever and itchy skin rashes. Rashes develop in crops on the body, and later spread to the face, arms and legs.
- The rashes first appear as flat spots and later as vesicles; the vesicles dry up after 3 - 4 days and then form scabs.
- The patient usually recovers in about 2 - 4 weeks.

### How do people get chickenpox?

- Chickenpox mainly spreads through droplets or air.
- It can also spread through contact with the discharge from patient's vesicles.
- It remains infectious from 1 - 2 days before rash appears until all vesicles have dried up, and is extremely contagious in the early stage of rash eruption.

### Is chickenpox serious?

- Chickenpox is generally a mild disease and is usually self-limiting. However, secondary bacterial infection of the wound may occur.
- Those with weakened immunity, pregnant women and newborn babies are more likely to suffer from severe complications such as pneumonia and encephalitis.
- Infection in early pregnancy may lead to congenital abnormalities of the fetus.



### What should we do when infected?

1. We should consult the doctor and follow advice to take medications, e.g. fever-lowering medicine and anti-itching lotion, to relieve symptoms.
2. Drink plenty of water and have adequate rest when having a fever.
3. We should also put on clean cotton gloves during sleep to prevent scratching of the vesicles and avoid contact with pregnant women and persons with weakened immunity.
4. Sick children should not go to school for about 1 week or until all vesicles have dried up to prevent spreading the disease to the others.
5. Parents should closely monitor the child's condition. If the child has persistent symptoms, immediate medical attention should be sought.
6. Parents should also watch out for signs and symptoms of chickenpox in other children at home.

### How can I prevent getting chickenpox?

- It is most important to upkeep good personal and environmental hygiene.
- Chickenpox vaccine is effective in preventing chickenpox infection.
- About 90% of persons who receive the vaccine will acquire immunity.



Information provided by Department of Health Hong Kong .

Please visit the Centre for Health Protection website: [www.chp.gov.hk](http://www.chp.gov.hk)

