

Chickenpox / Shingles

Chickenpox is a viral illness, which causes fever, general malaise and a characteristic blistering rash. The rash appears as small red "pimples" usually starting on the back, chest and stomach and spreading to the face, scalp, arms and elsewhere. Within a few hours the "pimples" become blisters, which begin to dry and crust within about 24 hours. Blisters may develop in the mouth and throat that can be painful and may give rise to difficulty in swallowing. The rash appears as a succession of crops over 3 to 5 days.

Chickenpox is not usually severe in children but can cause more serious symptoms in adults. The virus lies dormant in the body after chickenpox and may cause an attack of shingles in later life. A person with shingles is infectious and can give others chickenpox. It is not possible to get shingles from a case of chickenpox. The disease spreads easily from person-to-person. The greatest risk of transmission is just before the onset of the rash.

Precautions: Pregnant women or individuals with impaired immunity who have not had the disease and are in contact with a case should seek medical advice promptly.

Children under 18 with chickenpox should not be given aspirin or any aspirin containing products due to an association with Reyes syndrome, a very serious and potentially fatal condition.

Exclusion: Those with chickenpox should be excluded from school until scabs are dry; this is usually 5-7 days after the appearance of the rash.

Those with shingles, whose lesions cannot be covered, should be excluded from school until scabs are dry.

Resources: Useful information on chicken pox can be found at <http://www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/VaccinePreventable/VaricellaChickenpox/>.