



## INTRODUCTION

The E - Bulletin is a service provided from the in-house team of physicians (Specialists, GP's & the In-house Training Center) at the **CEDARS – Jebel Ali International Hospital** in order to raise awareness about health issues. This edition addresses the topic – Chickenpox.

### CHICKEN POX (VARICELLA ZOSTER )

Chickenpox is caused by a virus called *varicella zoster* a member of the herpesvirus family. The same virus also causes herpes zoster (shingles) in adults. Chickenpox most commonly affects children between 5-10 years of age.



### How does chickenpox does spread?

Chickenpox spreads in fine droplets of moisture, which contains the virus. The droplets are produced when the infected person coughs or sneezes; another person then inhales these droplets and may become infected. It can also be spread by direct contact with an infected person.

### What are the symptoms of chickenpox?

The number of chickenpox blisters is different for everyone. Some people get just a few bumps; others are covered from head to toe. People who get the virus often develop a rash of spots that look like blisters all over their bodies. The blisters are small and sit on an area of red skin that can be anywhere from the size of a pencil eraser to the size of a dime.

At first, the rash looks like pinkish dots that quickly develop a small blister on top (a blister is a bump on your skin that fills up with fluid). After about 24 to 48 hours, the fluid in the blisters gets cloudy and the blisters begin to crust over.

### Other symptoms of chickenpox include:

- Slight fever
- Loss of appetite
- Fatigue

Chickenpox blisters show up in waves, so after some begin to crust over, a new group of spots might appear. New blisters usually stop appearing by the seventh day, though they may stop as early as the third day. It usually takes 10-14 days for all the blisters to be scabbed over and then you are no longer contagious.

You have probably heard that chickenpox blisters are itchy. It's true. The illness also may come along with a runny nose and cough. But the good news is that chickenpox is a common illness for kids, and most get better by resting just like you do with a cold or the flu.



When someone becomes infected, the chickenpox usually appear 10 to 21 days later. People become contagious 1 to 2 days *before* breaking out with pox. They remain contagious while uncrusted blisters are present. When all of the sores have crusted over, the person is usually no longer contagious.

And the really good news is that, thanks to the chickenpox vaccine, lots of kids do not get chickenpox at all. Kids who do get it after they have gotten the shot often get less severe cases, which means they get better quicker.

### What is the treatment for chickenpox?

In most cases, it is enough to keep children comfortable while their own bodies fight the illness. *Oatmeal baths in lukewarm water* provide a crusty, comforting coating on the skin. An *oral antihistamine* can help to ease the itching, as can *topical lotions*. Trim the fingernails short to reduce secondary infections and scarring.

Safe *antiviral medicines* have been developed. To work well, they usually must be started within the first 24 hours of the rash.

For most otherwise healthy children without severe symptoms, antiviral medications are usually not used. Adults and teens, which are at risk for more severe symptoms, may benefit if the case is seen early in its course.



For those with skin conditions (such as eczema or recent sunburn), lung conditions (such as asthma), or those who have recently taken steroids, the antiviral medicines may be very important. The same is also true for adolescents and children who must take aspirin on an ongoing basis.

Some doctors also give antiviral medicines to people in the same household who subsequently come down with chickenpox. Because of their increased exposure, they would normally experience a more severe case of chickenpox.

**DO NOT GIVE ASPIRIN** to someone who may have chickenpox. Use of aspirin has been associated with a serious condition called Reyes Syndrome. Ibuprofen has been associated with more severe secondary infections. *Acetaminophen* may be used.

### What are possible complications?

- Women who get chickenpox during pregnancy are at risk for congenital infection of the fetus.
- Newborns are at risk for severe infection, if they are exposed and their mothers are not immune.
- A secondary infection of the blisters may occur.
- Encephalitis is a serious, but rare complication.



- Reye's syndrome, pneumonia, myocarditis, and transient arthritis are other possible complications of chickenpox.
- Cerebellar ataxia may appear during the recovery phase or later. This is characterized by a very unsteady walk.

## How can we prevent chickenpox?

Because chickenpox is airborne and very contagious before the rash even appears, it is difficult to avoid. It is possible to catch chickenpox from someone on a different aisle in the supermarket, who does not even know they have chickenpox!

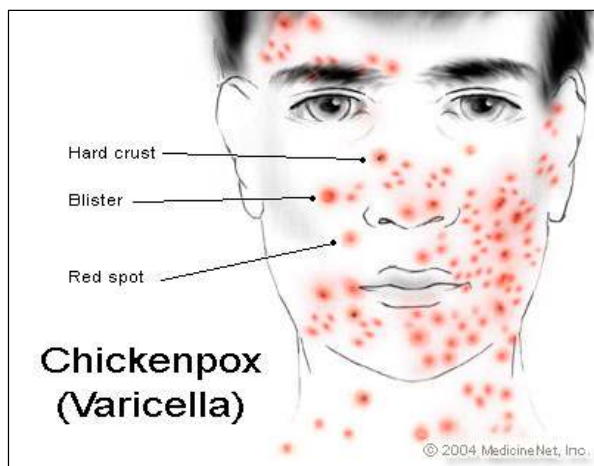
A chickenpox vaccine is part of the routine immunization schedule.

- Children receive two doses of the traditional chickenpox vaccine. The first should be given when the child is 12 - 15 months old. Children should receive the second dose when they are 4 - 6 years old.
- People ages 13 and older who have not received the vaccine and have not had chickenpox should get two doses, 4 - 8 weeks apart.

Almost no one will develop moderate or severe chickenpox if they have received the chickenpox vaccine. The small number of children who do develop chickenpox after they have received the vaccine have only a mild case.

The chickenpox vaccine does not require a booster later in life. However, a similar but different vaccine given later in life may reduce the incidence of herpes zoster (shingles).

Talk to your doctor if you think your child might be at high risk for complications and might have been exposed. Immediate preventive measures may be important. Giving the vaccine early after exposure may still reduce the severity of the disease.





## What is the link between chickenpox and shingles?

Once a person has had chickenpox they will develop immunity to it and will not contract it again. However, the virus lays dormant in your nervous system and if you had chickenpox as a child it may cause you to develop shingles later in life. You can only get shingles if you have previously had chickenpox.

## What is shingles?

Shingles is a painful rash, caused by an inflamed nerve. The actual rash is similar to that of chickenpox though it only affects one side of the body. You may also have headaches and feel very tired and run down. Unlike chickenpox, shingles is not very contagious, though you should stay away from those who have not had chickenpox.

## Call your doctor if:

- You are an adult with chickenpox.
- The blisters are infected.
- You have a temperature over 101<sup>o</sup>f (38.3<sup>o</sup>c).
- You have been vomiting.
- You are pregnant.
- You have a stiff neck and persistent sleepiness.
- Your eyes are very sensitive to bright light.

## NOTE:

For further information about our Dermatologist, please call +971 4 881 4000

## Medical Consultant for January 2011 issue:



### Dr. Pankajam Indrajit

*General Practitioner (Dermatologist)*  
*Dermatology, Venereology and Leprosy*  
CEDARS - Jebel Ali International Hospital