

Chickenpox (Varicella)

Parent /Caregiver Information

Children's Health Service, Wellington and Kenepuru Hospitals

What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is an illness caused by a virus, the Varicella Zoster virus.

What are the symptoms of chickenpox?

- Chills (fever), tiredness and headache
- Itchy red spots on the skin. These are normally seen on the face, back and tummy first but can be anywhere on the body, including in the mouth
- The skin spots (or rash) can sometimes become infected if your child scratches the spots

The symptoms of chickenpox usually last for 5 to 10 days.

Often children can rest at home to get better but sometimes children will need to be admitted to hospital if they have a bad case of chicken pox or they get any problems because of the illness. This may be infection of the skin or lungs, poor eating and drinking or swelling of the brain (encephalitis) in severe cases.

Chickenpox is spread to other people in the air through coughing or sneezing. It can also be spread from any fluid that may come from the red spots or rash.

What is the treatment for chickenpox?

Chicken pox is caused by a virus so antibiotics will not help. In severe cases an antiviral medicine may be given. This will not cure the chickenpox but can help ease the symptoms such as the itch and chills.

The best treatment is to try and keep your child comfortable. This can be done with calamine lotion applied to the rash with a soft cloth. Sometimes calamine lotion will stop your child from scratching the rash.

Encourage your child to continue to eat or drink. If the rash is in their mouth try cool food or drinks instead of hot. If they cannot eat or drink they

may need to get fluid through a small tube in their vein, this is IV (intravenous) fluids.

If your child develops any other illness because of the chicken pox your doctor will talk to you about treatment options.

Do I need to keep my child away from babies or unvaccinated children?

Yes. Chickenpox is very infectious; this means it is easy for other people to catch. Chickenpox can be very harmful for many people.

If your child is in hospital they will be cared for in a single room. This will help stop the spread of the infection to other people. Please restrict visitors to immediate family only.

If your child is at home with chickenpox restrict visitors until your child's rash has gone. It is very important pregnant women, babies, other children or people with low immunity are kept away while your child has chickenpox.

You should tell your child's day-care, kindergarten or school that your child has chickenpox.

How can I help my child at home?

- Encourage your child to drink often
- Apply calamine lotion with a soft cloth to ease the itch of the spots/rash
- Prevent your child from scratching the spots/rash as much as possible to stop infection
- Dress your child in cool cotton clothes. Long sleeves and trousers will help protect your child's skin if they are scratching the spots

What medication does my child need?

Calamine lotion is available at most pharmacies and can help lessen the itch from the spots/rash.

If your child is constantly scratching and has no relief from the calamine lotion, talk to your GP

about trying an anti-itch medication (also known as an anti-histamine).

Your child may need regular Paracetamol for the first few days of the illness. DO NOT give aspirin or ibuprofen as this can make the illness worse.

Signs to watch out for

Take your child to the GP or emergency department if they have any of these symptoms;

- Bad cough or trouble breathing
- Any signs of infection, this may be spots/rash that are red, warm to touch or oozing
- Your child has vomiting or diarrhoea
- Your child is not eating or drinking most meals
- Your child seems very tired, confused or hard to wake

Who to contact

If you have any concerns or questions about your child's health following surgery please contact your GP or After Hours Medical Centre.

After hours medical centres

Kenepuru Hospital Accident & Medical

Open 24hrs a day everyday (04) 918 2300

Paraparaumu -Team Medical Coastlands Shoppingtown

Open 8am -10pm everyday (04) 298 2228

Waikanae Medical Centre

Mon-Thurs 7pm-8am, Fri 5pm-8am, and at anytime during weekends or Public Holidays (04) 293 6002

Accident & Urgent Medical Centre Wellington

Open 8am-11pm every day (04) 384 4944

Healthline

If you are unsure if your child needs to visit your GP or Afterhours Medical Centre you may wish to call Healthline for free advice. Call free anytime on 0800 611 116

**Remember
In an emergency call 111**