

Preventing Chickenpox

Chickenpox is a very common and highly contagious disease that is often called one of the classic children's diseases, because so many people contract it during their childhood. Chickenpox is transmitted by direct contact and as well as by airborne transmission. Rare but serious complications can result from the disease for which it is necessary to seek immediate medical attention. The most common symptoms of chickenpox are fever, headache, stomach ache, and loss of appetite, followed by an itchy rash of blisters, normally lasting between 2 and 4 days. The cause of chickenpox is the varicella-zoster virus (VZV). Another name for this virus is human herpes virus 3 (HHV-3), a member of the herpes family that causes herpes zoster, also known as shingles, in adults.

Immunization

is the best defence against chickenpox. However, there are some people who do not believe in vaccination for themselves and their children. To keep from transmitting chickenpox to people such as this, as well as unvaccinated visitors from other countries, it is recommended that chickenpox sufferers remain isolated at home until 4 days after the symptoms have passed. Because the chickenpox virus is transmitted through the air and extremely contagious, it is particularly difficult to avoid contracting it. For these reasons, it is a very common childhood disease. For instance, it is possible to contract chickenpox from someone shopping in the next aisle at a supermarket, even if that person is not yet aware that they have the disease.

The varicella or chickenpox vaccine is an important part of a recommended immunization schedule for children. This vaccine is virtually 100% effective against moderate to severe cases of the disease, and about 85-90% effective against mild forms of the disease. What this means is that if a child is to be exposed to chickenpox, if they were to show symptoms at all, it is most likely that they will have a very mild case.

The chickenpox vaccine is one of a very small number of vaccines for which it is not necessary to get a booster. Once you have received the immunization, the majority of people are protected from chickenpox for life. However, a secondary dose of the vaccine may be given later in life to help prevent contraction of herpes zoster or shingles. The validity of re-immunization with the higher dose is currently being evaluated by many vaccination experts. Non-immune persons who have been exposed to chickenpox may receive the varicella vaccine within 3 days (72 hours) of the exposure to prevent or diminish the severity of the symptoms of the illness.

The varicella vaccine is strongly recommended for adolescents 13 years of age or older as well as adults who have not received the vaccine and have not already had chickenpox including:

- * Military personnel
- * College students.
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 - People in contact with immuno-compromised persons
- * People who work
 - with or near crowds of people, such as at markets, malls, train stations, or buses.
- * Healthcare workers
- * Non-pregnant women of childbearing age

- * International travellers
- * Teachers and day care workers
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- Residents and staff in institutional settings
- * Inmates and staff of correctional institutions

The varicella vaccine is also extremely safe. The most common side effects are mild and may include redness or pain at the site of the injection. It is possible to develop a mild rash. As with all medications, there are slight risks that serious problems could occur after receiving the vaccine. However, the potential risks associated with varicella disease greatly outweigh any potential risks associated with the varicella vaccine.