

Chicken Pox

This leaflet offers more information about chicken pox. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your care.

What is Chicken Pox and why has my child got it?

Chicken pox is a common and usually mild childhood infection. It is caused by a virus called Varicella Zoster and spreads very easily from one infected person to the next. Chicken pox is most common in children under the age of ten and is usually more prevalent in the winter and spring, particularly between March and May. Over 90% of children will have had chicken pox by the time they reach adolescence.

What are the signs and symptoms?

The most predominant symptom in chicken pox is the characteristic rash. The rash is made up of itchy, often fluid filled blisters which can appear all over the body but are usually most notable on the stomach, chest, face, scalp, behind the ears, arms and legs.

The blisters start as red spots, becoming very itchy and fluid filled in the first couple of days. After a further two or three days, the blisters begin to dry out and crust over. It is common for new spots to appear in waves over the first three to five days. Therefore different clusters of spots may be at different stages of blistering or drying out.

Some children also have a temperature (usually just before the rash appears) and are less active than usual. They may have a reduced appetite and complain of feeling sick or having achy arms and legs.

Do I need any tests to confirm the diagnosis?

In most cases, chicken pox is diagnosed by the characteristic appearance of the rash. Very occasionally, a blood test will be taken to confirm the acute infection however this is unnecessary in the majority of children.

What treatments are available?

Chicken Pox is generally a self-limiting illness that gets better on its own without any specific treatment.

There are some cases when additional treatment will be given to those with chicken pox. This is usually reserved for:

- Newborn babies
- Pregnant women
- People with a weakened immune system

If you think any of the above applies to you or your child, please inform your doctor or nurse.

Is there anything I can do to help my child?

Chicken pox can be uncomfortable for your child and there are a few measures you can take to help ease their symptoms:

- Use paracetamol (Calpol) if they are in pain or have a high fever.
- Ibuprofen (Nurofen) can occasionally cause skin reactions in children with chicken pox. Therefore it is best to avoid ibuprofen if you suspect your child has chicken pox. **NEVER** give aspirin to a child with chicken pox.
- Keep them well hydrated
- Take measures to reduce the itching such as applying calamine lotion or cooling gels.
- You can put socks or mitts over your child's hands to reduce scratching, especially at night.
- Antihistamines, such as Piriton, can be used if the itching is very severe. These can be purchased from most pharmacies.

How can I reduce the spread of chicken pox?

Chicken pox is spread in two main ways:

- by tiny droplets that come out the nose and mouth when an infected person coughs or sneezes.
- by touching surfaces that have been touched by an infected person and then touching your face.

People are infective from one to two days before the rash appears, until the last blister has crusted over. This is usually five to seven days after the rash was first noticed. The time frame (incubation period) from being in contact with an infected person to your child showing symptoms of chicken pox, can vary from 7-21 days.

To reduce the spread of chicken pox you should:

- Keep your child off school/nursery from the onset of rash until the last blister has crusted over
- Wash their bedding, towels and clothes regularly
- Avoid those at higher risk of complications (pregnant women, newborn babies, those with weakened immune systems)
- If you are due to fly, inform the airline as soon as the rash appears. You will usually be allowed to fly once the last spot has crusted over.

When to seek help

There are a few rare, but serious, complications associated with chicken pox. It is important to be aware of the signs of these to be able to seek help if necessary. You should see a doctor if your child:

- Develops spreading redness and pain around the spots
- Is drowsy, has problems with balance or walking, has severe headaches, is confused or irritable
- Has difficulty breathing
- Has a fever lasting more than five days

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Emergency Department on 020 87252666 and ask to be put through to the Paediatric Emergency Department.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings (near the lift foyer).
Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk



NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.
Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.
Tel: 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all of our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.