

Chickenpox and shingles

This leaflet is for parents and carers of children with chickenpox or shingles. It explains what the condition is, how it will affect your child and how the infection is treated. If you have any questions or concerns that aren't answered in the leaflet, please speak to one of the nursing staff.

What are chickenpox and shingles?

They are infections caused by the herpes virus called *Varicella zoster* and are commonly characterised as spots. Most people have chickenpox as a child and then make antibodies, which keep them immune from further chickenpox infection for the rest of their lives. However, the virus remains in the body and, in some people, will reappear later in life to cause shingles.

Is it contagious?

The chickenpox virus is very contagious and is usually spread through the air by coughing and sneezing or by direct contact (touching). Chickenpox is infectious during its early stages, from 1-2 days before and up until the last spot has crusted over. Shingles is not infectious unless you touch the spots.

How do I know if my child has chickenpox?

Usually your child will start with a sudden but slight fever (high temperature) and will complain of feeling unwell. An itchy rash will appear with flat red spots that eventually become raised and filled with fluid. The rash is usually on the body more than on the face, arms and legs. The spots often appear in patches coming one after another and will scab over 3-4 days after appearing. Shingles causes pain and spots, usually just on one side of the face or body.

What should I do if my child has chickenpox?

- You should keep your child resting at home while they have a fever and spots, keeping them cool by reducing the amount of clothing or bedding.
- You can give him/her a mild painkiller such as paracetamol (Calpol), using the dosage recommended on the bottle.
- Try to stop your child from scratching their spots and use a lotion/cream to soothe itching.
- Make sure you wash your hands or any face cloths or clothing that comes into contact with the spots. Towels and bedding must not be shared.
- Itching may be eased by bathing in water which has had oatmeal added.
- Shingles can be treated with a drug that kills the virus.
- If you are anxious about your child's condition, contact your GP at once.
- This is important if the child has extremely high temperature or appears to be so drowsy as to be difficult to awaken, or cannot tolerate bright lights.

What should I not do?

- Do NOT use Ibuprofen (Nurofen) unless advised to do so by a doctor, as it may cause serious skin infections
- Do NOT give Aspirin to children under 16.
- Do NOT be around pregnant women, new-born babies and people with a weakened immune system, as chickenpox can be dangerous for them

Are there any possible complications from chickenpox or shingles?

Chickenpox can be more serious for the following:

- New-born babies.
- Pregnant women.
- Those with poor resistance to infection (the immuno-suppressed).

It is important for all of the above to avoid contact with someone with chickenpox. If you have any concerns that contact has been made, speak to your GP at once.

How soon can my child return to school?

As soon as they are feeling better and all the spots have crusted over.

The chickenpox vaccine

You can get the [chickenpox vaccine](#) on the NHS if there's a risk of you spreading the virus to someone who could be harmed because of weakened immune system. For example, a child can be vaccinated if one of their parents is having chemotherapy.

You can also pay for the vaccine at some private clinics or travel clinics. It costs between £120 and £200.

Shingles and chickenpox

- You cannot catch shingles from someone with chickenpox.
- You can catch chickenpox from someone with shingles if you have not had chickenpox before.
- When you get chickenpox, the virus stays in your body. The virus can be triggered again if your immune system is weak. This causes shingles.

Contacting us

Paediatric Emergency Department: 0118 322 6875 / 6876

Further information

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/chickenpox/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/shingles/>

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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