

Chickenpox

Can Chickenpox be prevented?

Chickenpox immunisation is now included in the national immunisation schedule - the series of vaccines that are offered free to babies, children and adolescents, and adults. That means your child can have chickenpox immunisation at 15 months of age, together with their other vaccines.

Most people who have this vaccine will not get chickenpox. If an immunised person does get chickenpox, it is usually mild. Your child can also have free chickenpox immunisation if they turn 11 years of age on or after 1 July 2017, if they haven't already had chickenpox or chickenpox immunisation. Certain high-risk people will still be able to get the vaccine free regardless of their age. Talk to your family doctor or practice nurse.

Relieving symptoms:

You could try giving your child a cool or lukewarm bath but do not use soap as it can dry out your child's skin. Try adding oatmeal, baking soda or moisturising bath lotion to the water. Pat skin dry, do not rub, after bathing.

For many years, people have used calamine lotion to help with the itch from chickenpox and found it may relieve itching. There's really no clear evidence around its use. Calamine is generally considered to be safe although some suggest it may dry the skin too much.

If your child with chickenpox also has eczema, and the above steps are not controlling the itching, you might like to speak to a health professional for advice.

Can I use medicines to relieve chickenpox symptoms?

If your child is miserable because of a fever, headachd or other aches and pains, you can give paracetamol to make them more comfortable. You must follow the dosage instructions on the bottle. It is dangerous to give more than the recommended dose. You should avoid the following:

- **aspirin** - never give your child or young person aspirin as this may increase the risk of Reye syndrome, which is a rare and serious illness
- **ibuprofen** - (Nurofen, Brufen, Fenaped) - the use of ibuprofen may be associated with more severe skin and soft tissue infections after chickenpox (particularly necrotising fasciitis, a rare infection fo the deeper layers of the skin)

Are there likely to be complications?

In the majority of children, chickenpox is a mild illness and they get better completely. Sometimes, scarring from the spots can occur. There can sometimes be complications which require a hospital stay or intensive care.

The most common complication is a secondary skin infection. Around 1 in 20 healthy children develop a bacterial skin infection which needs treatment with antibiotic medicine. Bacterial skin infections can lead to bacterial infection in other parts of the body, including pneumonia and bloodstream infection (septicaemia).

Other rare complications include:

- encephalitis (brain inflammation)
- severe secondary infections needing intensive care
- death - in very rare cases, children can die of complications from chickenpox