

Chicken Pox (Herpes varicella)

Symptoms: In children the rash is usually the first symptom, with accompanying lethargy , fever , sore throat and ears , body and joint pain , nausea and loss of appetite. The disease is typically more severe in adults than children. Infection in pregnancy prior to 28weeks can be harmful to the fetus. The rash begins on the torso and spreads to the head, face and extremities. The chicken pox lesion starts as a 2-4mm red papule which develops an irregular red outline (rose petal). A clear vesicle (dew drop) develops on this papule. This “dew drop on a rose petal” lesion is very characteristic for chickenpox. After about 12 hours the vesicle breaks and crusts over. This watery fluid is highly contagious. This crust takes about 7days to fall off. Scarring is minimalised by preventing scratching and resulting secondary infections of lesions.



Transmission: Chickenpox is spread easily by airborne viruses and through contact with the lesions. The incubation period averages 14 days , with a range between 9-21days. An infected person is contagious until all lesions have crusted over. As it is common to have new crops of lesions every few days, it is advisable to be cautious when sending the child back to school. The spread of chickenpox can be severely restricted by isolating infectious individuals. Good hygiene practices when coughing, sneezing, and frequent hand washing contribute to preventing transmission.

Treatment: This is focused mainly on easing of the symptoms and preventing secondary bacterial infections of the lesions. Cut nails short and prevent scratching as best as possible. Use calamine or topical antihistamine creams to minimize itching. Daily bathing to ensure good skin hygiene. Treat the fever and pain with paracetamol. Seek medical attention for any prolonged symptoms like coughing , ear pain or infected lesions.