

Chickenpox Symptoms and Complications

Chickenpox is a very common disease amongst children, and is a highly contagious disease. Chickenpox can be transmitted by direct contact as well as by airborne transmission. There are several rare but serious complications that can arise as a result of the disease. These require immediate medical attention. The best method for avoiding chickenpox is immunization against it.

The most common initial chickenpox symptoms are fever, headache, stomach ache, and loss of appetite, followed by an itchy rash of blisters generally lasting for 2 to 4 days. The rash usually consists of many small, itchy, fluid-filled blisters that begin to appear on the face and consequently spread until they cover the torso and scalp, and eventually the arms and legs. It is the blisters on the scalp that strongly indicate chickenpox is the cause.

Normally after a day or two, the blisters develop a cloudy appearance, and then become scab-covered sores. Simultaneously, new waves of blisters continually appear and develop following the same life-cycle. Chickenpox blisters can and often do appear in the mouth, in the vagina, and even on the eyelids. Children who suffer from other skin problems, like eczema or who have had a recent sunburn, may develop more than 1,500 chickenpox blisters. However, absent these skin conditions, normally approximately 250-500 blisters develop. Generally, scars will not remain once the chickenpox has healed unless the blisters become infected with bacteria as a result of scratching.

Although the majority of people recover from chickenpox without suffering any serious symptoms or complications, a small minority of people do contract serious complications.

The various rare complications from chickenpox include:

- * Secondary infection of the blisters and scarring of the skin can occur if the sufferer scratches the blisters.
- * Encephalitis
- * Pneumonia
- * Reye's syndrome
- * Transient arthritis
- * Myocarditis
- * Cerebellar ataxia
- * Severe infection of the newborn baby if they are exposed to the disease and their mothers are not immune.
- * Infection of the fetus by mothers infected with chickenpox.

Between 4,000 and 9,000 persons are hospitalized as a result of chickenpox in the United States each year. Additionally, up to 100 people die as a direct result of the disease or related complications. Newborn babies, adults, and people with weakened immune systems have the highest risk of associated complications. Despite the fact that adults make up fewer than 5% of chickenpox cases in the United States, they make up half of the chickenpox-related deaths.

