

Learn about Chickenpox

Chickenpox is a common disease caused by a virus called the varicella-zoster virus (VZV). Varicella-zoster virus spreads in the air through coughs or sneezes or through contact with fluid from inside the chickenpox blisters.

Chickenpox, which occurs most often in late winter and early spring, is a communicable disease. It can be spread very easily. Chickenpox is very contagious. If your brother gets chickenpox and you have not had it yet, there is an 80%–90% chance that you will get it too.

Although it is more common in persons under the age of 15, anyone can get chickenpox. A person has only one episode of chickenpox in his or her lifetime.



One of the symptoms of chickenpox is an itchy rash.

If you have a younger brother or sister, they may never get chickenpox. For the last few years, the chickenpox vaccine has been required of all children before they go to school. The vaccine gives you some of the chickenpox virus, but not enough to get you sick. Your body thinks you have had chickenpox and builds up defenses. You cannot get chickenpox again.

One of the symptoms of chickenpox is a red, itchy rash on the skin. The chickenpox rash usually appears first on the abdomen or back and face. Then it spreads to almost everywhere else on the body, including the scalp, mouth, nose, and ears.

Some people can have only a small rash, while others have a serious rash that spreads all over their body. The rash may begin as many small, red bumps

that look like pimples or insect bites. These bumps are about two to four millimeters wide. They develop into thin-walled blisters filled with clear fluid. The fluid in the blisters becomes cloudy. The blister wall breaks, leaving open sores. The sores finally crust over to become dry, brown scabs.

Some infected people have a fever, abdominal pain, or a vague sick feeling a day or two before the rash appears. These symptoms may last for a few days. The fever stays in the range of 37.7°C to 38.8°C (100°F to 102°F). Younger children often have milder symptoms and fewer blisters than older children or adults.