
Chickenpox

Self-care and when to get help, for adults and parents or carers.

Chickenpox is caused by the varicella virus. Most healthy children recover at home within 1 to 2 weeks. It can be more serious in adults and some other people.

Call 999 now if you or your child has:

Severe breathing difficulty, or blue, grey or very pale lips or skin.

Confusion, difficulty waking, a collapse or a seizure.

A new rash that does not fade when pressed with a clear glass.

On brown or black skin, colour changes may be easier to see on the palms or soles.

Do not wait for a rash if seriously unwell.

Pregnant, weakened immunity or a newborn baby?

Get urgent advice from CHG or NHS 111 now if you develop chickenpox or have been near someone with chickenpox or shingles. This also applies if a newborn baby has symptoms or has been exposed.

Do not wait for a rash after contact. Treatment may be needed. Tell the team before attending in person.

Get medical advice today if:

- Skin around spots becomes hot, swollen or very painful. Redness can be harder to see on brown or black skin.
- You cannot drink enough, keep fluids down or pass urine, or a child has fewer wet nappies.
- You become more breathless, develop new problems walking or balancing, or are getting worse.
- A child has a fever for 5 days or more. Get urgent advice now for a baby under 3 months with 38°C or more, or aged 3 to 6 months with 39°C or more.

Contact CHG; call NHS 111 when closed, including weekends, or if urgent help is not available promptly. Contact details are on page 2.

Could antiviral treatment help?

If you are **over 14** and think you have chickenpox, **contact CHG today, ideally within 24 hours of the rash starting**. A clinician can advise whether antiviral treatment would help. Most healthy children do not need them. Get early advice too for babies under 1, severe eczema or a weak immune system. Do not delay help because more than 24 hours have passed.

Antibiotics do not treat chickenpox itself, but may be needed if the spots become infected with bacteria.

How to recognise chickenpox

An itchy rash usually starts 10 to 21 days after contact. Spots become fluid-filled blisters, then scabs. Different stages can appear together. Fever, tiredness and poor appetite are common.

Spots can occur anywhere, including the mouth or genitals. They may look darker or the same colour as brown or black skin. Getting chickenpox twice is uncommon, but possible.

Photos are examples only. If unsure it is chickenpox, contact CHG.



Lighter skin



Darker skin

Photographs: CDC / Public Health Image Library (6121 and 4367).

What you can do at home

- **Fluids:** offer small drinks often. Cool drinks, soup or ice lollies may help if the mouth is sore. Keep breastfeeding or giving usual milk feeds.
- **Pain or discomfort:** paracetamol can help. Follow the age-appropriate dose and maximum on the packet. Do not combine products containing paracetamol. Ask a pharmacist if unsure.
- **Avoid ibuprofen** unless a doctor advises it, because of the risk of serious skin infection. **Do not give aspirin to children under 16** unless prescribed.
- **Itching:** keep cool in loose clothes. Try a cool bath and pat dry. Keep nails short and avoid scratching. Socks over a young child's hands at night may help.
- A pharmacist can advise on soothing creams or cooling gels and an antihistamine suitable for the person's age. Some antihistamines cause drowsiness.

Check your child regularly, including at night. Get advice if you are worried, even if the symptom is not listed on page 1.

Help stop it spreading

Chickenpox spreads easily through the air and contact with blister fluid. You can pass it on from 2 days before the rash until all spots have crusted.

Stay off nursery, school or work until every spot has formed a scab, usually around 5 days after the rash starts. Avoid newborn babies, pregnant people and people with weakened immunity. Wash hands and do not share towels. Check with the airline before flying.

Vaccination and more information

The NHS now offers chickenpox protection in the MMRV vaccine. Timing depends on your child's date of birth. Check the NHS schedule or ask CHG about missed doses.

[NHS chickenpox advice and rash photos: nhs.uk/conditions/chickenpox/](https://nhs.uk/conditions/chickenpox/)

[NHS MMRV schedule: nhs.uk/vaccinations/mmr-vaccine/](https://nhs.uk/vaccinations/mmr-vaccine/)

Contact CHG

Use the online contact form: cirencesterhealthgroup.co.uk/appointments/

If unable to use it, call **01285 653184** or **01285 653122**. Tell us it may be chickenpox before coming in. When closed, call **111** for urgent advice.

Contact CHG if you need help understanding this leaflet or need another format.