

# Chicken Pox (Varicella)

Chickenpox is an acute, infectious disease caused by the varicella-zoster virus (VZV) and is most commonly seen in children under 10 years old. This virus can also cause shingles (herpes zoster) which tends to be more common in adults. The disease can be more serious in adults, particularly pregnant women.

## Transmission

Varicella is transmitted directly by personal contact or droplet spread.

The secondary infection rate from household contact with a case of chickenpox can be as high as 90%.

## Symptoms

The illness starts with one to two days of fever and malaise. Vesicles begin to appear on the face and scalp, spreading to the trunk and abdomen and eventually to the limbs.

After three or four days, the vesicles dry with a granular scab and **are usually followed by further crops.**

The virus is plentiful in the nasopharynx in the first few days and in the vesicles before they dry up.

**Exclusion-** until all vesicles have crusted over.

## Varicella vaccine

Available for non-immune healthcare workers. Adults and children in regular or close contact with someone who has a weakened immune system and is at risk of serious illness if they catch chickenpox

**Incubation period** is around 11- 21 days. The most infectious time is 2 days prior to eruption of vesicles



Patients who have been in contact with someone who has chickenpox (or you have symptoms) and are pregnant, breastfeeding or have a weakened immune system should contact their GP for advice.

## Risks to the fetus.

**In the first 20 weeks of pregnancy –**

congenital (fetal) varicella syndrome.

**In the second and third trimesters of pregnancy herpes zoster**

in an otherwise healthy infant.

Occasional cases of fetal damage comprising

chorioretinal damage, microcephaly and skin scarring

**A week before, to a week after delivery –**

severe and even fatal disease in the neonate.



## VZIG post exposure prophylaxis is required for:

Pregnant women exposed at any time in pregnancy during the first 20 weeks of gestation without antibody history and

Pregnant women who develop chickenpox in the period 7 days before delivery and up to 7 days after

If a pregnant woman is not immune to VZV and has been exposed to chickenpox she should be offered V Z IG as soon as possible.

If there is uncertainty of status then blood should be taken for antibody to VZ Virus.

**Immuno globulin can only be obtained through Public Health England 03442250562**