

What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a disease that causes an itchy rash of blisters and a fever. A person with chickenpox may have as many as 500 blisters. The rash spreads over the whole body. **Chickenpox can be serious, even life-threatening**, especially in babies, adolescents, adults, pregnant people, and people with weakened immune systems.

What are the symptoms of chickenpox?

- An itchy rash of blisters
- Fever
- Headache
- Feeling tired

Symptoms usually last about a week. In some cases, chickenpox can cause serious problems.

Some people vaccinated against chickenpox can still get the disease, called breakthrough chickenpox. However, they usually have milder symptoms with fewer or no blisters (or just red spots), a mild or no fever, and are sick for a shorter period than people who are not vaccinated.

Is chickenpox serious?

Chickenpox is usually mild in children, but the itching can be very uncomfortable. Children who get chickenpox can miss about a week of school or childcare.

In some cases, chickenpox can cause serious problems, such as:

- Skin infections
- Dehydration (loss of body fluids)
- Pneumonia (an infection in the lungs)
- Encephalitis (swelling of the brain)
- Rarely, chickenpox may lead to death.

How does chickenpox spread?

Chickenpox spreads easily from people with chickenpox to others who have never had the disease or never been vaccinated. Chickenpox can also spread from people with shingles.

The disease spreads mainly through close contact with someone who has chickenpox or shingles. For example, it can spread when a person touches or breathes in the virus particles that come from the blisters when they get scratched.

Chickenpox can spread 1 to 2 days before the infected person gets a rash, and then doesn't stop spreading until all the blisters have formed scabs. Vaccinated people who get chickenpox may develop lesions that do not form scabs. These people are contagious until no new lesions appear for 24 hours.

Chickenpox is very [contagious](#). If one person has it, about 9 out of 10 people close to that person who are not protected against chickenpox will also become infected.