

# Chickenpox and measles

## Chickenpox

Chickenpox is a mild and common childhood illness. It is highly infectious and can cause serious illness in adults who have not had chickenpox. It causes a rash of red, itchy spots that turn into fluid-filled blisters, which crust over to form scabs, and eventually drop off. Some children have only a few spots, while others can have spots covering their entire body. These are most likely to appear on the face, ears and scalp, under the arms, on the chest, tummy and on the arms and legs.

Chickenpox is caused by a virus. It is infectious from one to two days before the rash starts, until all the blisters have crusted over (five to six days after the start of the rash). To prevent spreading the infection, keep children away from nursery/school until all their spots have crusted over.

Your child will probably feel pretty miserable and irritable while they have it. They may have a fever for the first few days and the spots can be incredibly itchy.

Paracetamol (sugar-free) can help relieve fever and calamine lotion or cooling gels help ease itching.

Chickenpox usually gets better on its own. However, some children can become more seriously ill and need to see a doctor.

### **Contact your GP straight away if:**

- Blisters become infected.
- Your child has chest pain or difficulty breathing.
- You are pregnant.
- You or any adult at home have not had chickenpox.

## Measles

Measles is a very infectious, viral illness which, in rare cases, can be fatal. One in five children with measles experience complications such as ear infections, diarrhoea and vomiting, pneumonia, meningitis and eye disorders. There is no treatment for measles. Vaccination is the only way of preventing it, so make sure your child has their MMR vaccination. Speak to your health visitor.

**Symptoms develop around 10 days after you are infected and can include:**

- Cold-like symptoms.
- Red eyes and sensitivity to light.
- A fever.
- Greyish white spots in the mouth and throat.

After a few days, a red-brown spotty rash appears. Starting behind the ears, it then spreads around the head and neck before spreading to the rest of the body. If there are no complications, symptoms usually disappear within 7-10 days.

**Contact your GP if you suspect you or your child may have measles.**

Help to make your child comfortable:

- Close the curtains/dim lights to help reduce light sensitivity.
- Use damp cotton wool to clean eyes.
- Give sugar-free paracetamol or ibuprofen.
- Ensure they drink lots.

**Health visitor says**

Do not forget to keep up-to-date with immunisations to protect your child from measles (MMR vaccination). It is never too late for your children (or you) to catch up with the MMR vaccination if they missed it earlier.

**Midwife says**

If you are pregnant and have had chickenpox in the past, it is likely you are immune to chickenpox, but your child could still get it. However, please contact your GP or midwife for advice.

**Scarlet fever**

Scarlet fever is a bacterial illness that mainly affects children. It causes a distinctive pink-red rash. It's important to be aware of the signs and symptoms of scarlet fever, see your GP if you think your child may have it because it needs to be treated. Scarlet fever usually follows a sore throat or a skin infection, such as impetigo.

Initial symptoms usually include a sore throat, headache and a high temperature (38°C/100.4°F or above), flushed cheeks and a swollen tongue.

A day or two later, the characteristic pinkish rash appears, usually on the chest and stomach before spreading to other areas of the body. The rash feels like sandpaper to touch and it

may be itchy. On darker skin the rash may be more difficult to see although its rough texture should be apparent.

## **Painkillers**

If your child is in pain or has a high temperature (fever), you can give them paracetamol (check correct dosage for the age of your child). Do not give ibuprofen to children with chickenpox because it may increase the risk of skin infection. **Aspirin should not be given to children under the age of 16.**