

# Varicella

## (Chickenpox)

«Chickenpox» is a contagious childhood disease caused by initial contact with varicella zoster viruses. These viruses are transmitted through direct contact with individuals who are currently ill with chickenpox.

### Symptoms

Children develop a typical rash, and possibly fever, 10-21 days after infection. The rash spreads throughout the whole body within hours. The mucous membranes (mouth, genitals) can also be affected. The eyes are also rarely affected.

Initially red spots form, which become papules a bit later. Blisters quickly form in the centre of the papules, which burst and finally become encrusted.

All forms can occur simultaneously.

### Therapy

The treatment of chickenpox is limited to the alleviation of itching and lowering fever if need be. The following medications can be utilised for this purpose:

- Taking drops against itching (antihistamines such as dimetinden maleate)
- Antipruritic substance for painting the rash (antipruritics)
- Lowering fever with suppositories or syrup (antipyretics such as paracetamol)



## Complications

The illness usually progresses favourably among children. The following complications can infrequently occur:

- Bacterial skin infections (yellow/purulent scab with widespread reddened skin around the scab)
- Middle ear inflammation, pneumonia
- Encephalitis (movement disorder or coordination disorder at the end of the illness or afterwards)
- Chickenpox can be dangerous and progress very severely for individuals with an immunodeficiency

## Prophylaxis

Chickenpox in adulthood is rare, often progresses severely and with substantially more complications. That is why adolescents (and adults) who were not yet previously ill with chickenpox should be vaccinated. Some children, such as those with an immunodeficiency, leukaemia or neurodermatitis, have a higher risk of

chickenpox which progress severely or with many complications. These children and their families should be advised by their paediatrician or family doctor and be promptly vaccinated for protection against such an illness.

## When should you contact a doctor?

The following signs indicate a complication with chickenpox:

- Pains (e.g. earaches, headaches...) which do not become better with paracetamol
- Trouble breathing
- Signs of a bacterial skin infection (yellow/purulent scab with widespread reddened skin around the scab)
- Vomiting and/or insufficient / lacking fluid intake
- Sudden uneasy walking, repeatedly falling down, trembling
- Or if you are worried about your child for any other reason