

Health News
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Chicken Pox

Chickenpox or Varicella is a highly contagious viral disease caused by exposure to the Varicella Zoster virus (VZV), which is a member of the Herpes virus group.

All Herpes viruses have one common feature: they are not eliminated from the body after infection but remain latent in the nerve ganglia and may later resurface and cause shingles (Herpes Zoster) years after an episode of chickenpox.

Manifestations and risks:

This viral disease is characterised by itching and a skin rash with fluid-filled blisters that burst and form flaky skin remnants. The onset of the chickenpox rash may be preceded by a day of mild fever and general malaise. The rash begins with a few small reddish

the diagnosis.

Chickenpox seldom causes permanent scarring. Chickenpox lesions can become infected, usually from scratching and most frequently with bacteria. Other complications include Encephalitis, Reye's syndrome, Pneumonia, Myocarditis, Transient arthritis and Ataxia. Immuno-suppressed persons (e.g. persons with depressed immune systems, newborns, victims of AIDS, Leukaemia, or Lymphoma, and patients undergoing Chemotherapy or organ transplant) are at risk of severe disease. Rarely, women who acquire chickenpox early in pregnancy are at risk for congenital malformations in the foetus.

Contact with respiratory droplets or secretions from the lesions result in the spread of Chickenpox. It is contagious two days before the onset of the rash until six days after the rash has set in, or until scabs form. The incubation period (appearance of disease after contact with the infected bacterium) is 10 to 21 days. Most children have been infected with the virus by the age of 10 years. Lifelong immunity against recurrence of chickenpox usually develops in previously infected persons.

Treatment:

General measures to relieve itching associated with skin lesions include cool water soaks or cold compresses, and bathing with one cup of baking soda added to a bathtub of lukewarm water. Skin preparations such as non-prescription Calamine lotion, Antihistamines, or other lotions containing camphor, menthol or phenol may be helpful. Fingernails should be trimmed to prevent scratching, which may lead to a secondary infection. Infant's hands may be covered with a soft cotton or flannel mittens to prevent scratching. Children should be kept home from school until all the blisters have broken and scabs have formed. This prevents spread of the disease to other children.

Do not use Aspirin! To reduce fever, use Paracetamol instead of Aspirin. Aspirin use during a viral illness, particularly chickenpox, has been associated with a risk of

developing Encephalopathy or Reye's syndrome. A sedative may be prescribed for sleepless nights.

Prevention:

Varicella Zoster Immune Globulin (VZIG) may modify the severity of the disease, or prevent the disease if given within 96 hours after exposure to the virus. However this is reserved for high-risk individuals because the disease usually is benign in normal individuals. High-risk individuals are those with no past history of chickenpox and who have an Immuno-compromising condition and have been exposed to chickenpox. In Pakistan VZIG is not available currently. Varicella vaccine has been used extensively and is a very effective vaccine. It is recommended between the ages of 12 and 18 months. Older children with no history of disease can also be given this vaccine. A blood test can also be drawn to see if he or she is susceptible to the disease, and if so the vaccine should be administered.

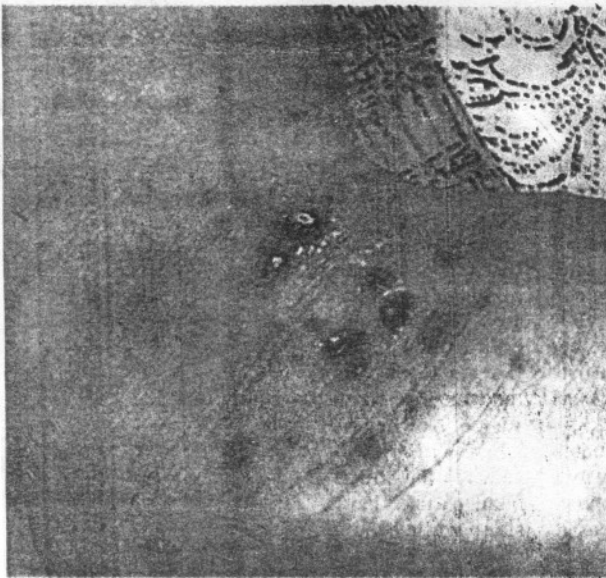
There are at least three important reasons why chicken pox should be avoided:

1 From the physical point of view, chickenpox is extremely uncomfortable for the patient. The patient has to be confined and can lead to him/her missing important events, even exams or travel has to be cancelled. The parent at home is also at greater risk because of the risk of a second case, which is usually more severe than the first one.

2 Secondly, at least one parent has to dedicate herself/himself to stay home and care for their sick child. Adult patients have to miss work until their condition improves. In addition, there are the expenses related to medication, visits to the physician and additional tests.

3 The third reason you should try to avoid chickenpox is the good news that there's already an efficient vaccine that will now be available in Pakistan against the disease. The vaccine promotes a long lasting protection in healthy children, adolescents and adults, as well as, people with depressed immune systems (such as patients with Leukaemia, for instance). And, in case you take the vaccine up to three/four days after contact with the virus, it is quite likely that you'll be protected and will not develop the disease.

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Chickenpox is one of the most common childhood diseases and is usually mild but also highly infectious

bumps (Papules) that quickly fill with fluid to form small blisters (vesicles). The vesicles appear in small groups or crops, beginning on the trunk then spreading to the extremities, face and scalp within two to four days. This rash may develop in the mouth and other internal parts of the body. These vesicles can be few or involve the entire body, varying in different individuals. The vesicles break and light brown scabs form on the skin. This gradually darkens to a dark reddish brown scab before it finally falls off, usually within two weeks of the onset of the illness. The appearance of the rash is sufficient to establish