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SELF-CARE INFORMATION ON CHICKENPOX

What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is an infection caused by the varicella virus. It cannot be treated with antibiotics. It is very contagious, easy to catch and easily spread by prolonged contact with an individual with chickenpox or from fluid droplets in the air from coughing.

How do I recognise Chickenpox?

The rash usually starts 10-21 days after being exposed to someone with the infection. The most common signs are a mild fever, itchy rash with blisters, feeling tired and miserable. The rash usually starts on the chest, back or face before moving to other areas including the mouth. At first the rash looks like small pimples that later become crops of blisters full of fluid.

A person with chickenpox is infectious to others two days before the rash develops until the last blister has dried and scabbed - the fluid in the blisters contains live virus. Most people are unwell for five to seven days and the rash lasts six to eight days. Children and adults of any age can get chickenpox, but it is more common in children. It is rare but possible to get it more than once.

Complications

There are a number of possible complications, but these are rare. The most common being a secondary infection of the spots.

Treatment

Treatment is usually to help relieve the symptoms only. There are many over the counter preparations available at pharmacies.

Antivirals may be considered in those presenting with severe symptoms, within 24 hours and those with underlying serious medical conditions at risk of complication. Children with eczema need to be careful as they can get severe chickenpox.

What should I do now?

- Make sure your child drinks plenty of fluids: sips of water / juice, soups, and ice lollies
- Do not let them overheat as this makes the itching worse
- Keep them at home until the last spot has dried to a blister scab

What medication can I take/ give my child?

- If discomfort or fever, then **Paracetamol** 4 – 6 hourly can be helpful
- Ibuprofen is **not recommended** for pain or fever management in chickenpox.
- **Antihistamine** such as Piriton can be helpful for the itch
- A moisturising **emollient** cream may help soothe the skin

Returning to nursery/school

Children should be kept away from school until the spots are crusted over- which is usually around 6 days after the rash appears. **Air travel is not allowed for five days** after the appearance of the last spot

When should I seek medical advice?

- If you a high fever, become drowsy or have a non-blanching rash (which does not disappear when you press on it with a glass)
- If you get large red sore areas around the rash as this implies secondary infection
- If you develop breathing problems or blueness around the mouth
- If you develop difficulty walking or poor co-ordination of normal movements
- If you are unable to eat and drink due to sores in the mouth, or unable to pass urine due to sores on the genitals causing severe pain and discomfort
- If you are pregnant and get chickenpox

Prognosis

For most, chickenpox infection is a self-limiting, relatively mild disease without complications. Severe disease and complications are more likely to occur in children younger than 1 year of age, adolescents, adults, pregnant women, and immunocompromised people.

Recovery from primary varicella infection usually leads to lifelong immunity. Recurrence of varicella infection in otherwise healthy people is uncommon. Recurrence may be more likely in people who are immunocompromised.

Useful contacts

- Ask your pharmacist
- Patient UK - www.patient.co.uk
- NHS Choices, www.nhs.uk/conditions/

If you have further questions:

Call the **practice** on *01285 653184 or 01285 653122*

If you require **urgent** medical advice, call *111 (24 hours)*

In an **emergency** call **999**