

## Are there any special risks?

Chickenpox can affect the developing baby of a pregnant woman (especially during the early and very late stages) if she does **not** have natural immunity. If you are pregnant and you have been in contact with chickenpox **always** discuss this with your doctor or midwife immediately so that they can advise you if you need any blood tests or treatments.

For more information about **Chickenpox** please contact:

*The Community Infection Prevention and Control Nurse*

*or*

*your local Health Protection Unit*

*or*

<http://www.hpa.org.uk/topics>

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The Health Protection Agency North West,  
North West Infection Prevention and Control Nurses

and

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# HPA North West



# Chickenpox

INFORMATION LEAFLET

## What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is an infection caused by the Varicella Zoster virus.

## What are the symptoms?

- The time from exposure to developing symptoms is 2-3 weeks - usually 15-18 days.

Symptoms include:

- An itchy sometimes painful rash with blister-like spots, which contain fluid and occur in 'crops' over several days.
- The rash is usually worse on the trunk and face, but can affect the scalp, hands, feet, eyes and mouth.
- Fever – mild to moderate.
- Headache.
- General malaise.
- Muscle aches.

## Who does it affect?

Usually children - especially young children under 10 years of age.

Adults and older children can be affected, but over 90% of people will have acquired natural immunity by the time they are young adults.

Immunity is usually life-long.

## How is it passed on?

Chickenpox is highly infectious and is easily passed to someone by direct contact with:

- The secretions of the nose and throat
- The liquid from the blister-like spots of the rash
- Contact with items recently contaminated by both of these secretions, for example hankies, towels and bed linen.

## Should you stay off work or school?

You should stay off of work or school for 5 days after the onset of the rash and should avoid contact with immune-suppressed people, pregnant women and others who may not have had chickenpox.

The most infectious period is from 1 to 2 days before the rash appears but infectivity continues until all the lesions have crusted over (commonly about 5 to 6 days after onset of illness).

People are not infectious once the rash is dry and crusts over.

## Do you need any treatment?

Treatment is rarely required for chickenpox, but some people may develop symptoms that require treatment.

An itchy rash can be treated with calamine lotion or antihistamines.

The rash may be painful so pain-killers may be needed, **but do not use aspirin in children under 16 years of age.**