

## **CHICKEN POX FACT SHEET**

**Parents are kindly requested to keep their children out of school until all of the blisters have scabbed over and are completely dry.**

### **What is chicken pox?**

Chicken pox is a virus that causes a very itchy rash of red, itchy spots that turn into fluid-filled blisters. They then crust over to form scabs, which eventually drop off.

Some children have only a few spots, but other children can have spots that cover their entire body. These are most likely to appear on the face, ears and scalp, under the arms, on the chest and stomach, and on the arms and legs. It is highly contagious.

### **What are the symptoms of measles?**

- Chicken pox often starts with a high fever a day or so before a rash appears.
- Spots (rash) appear in crops. They develop into small blisters and are itchy. They can be anywhere on the body. Blister crops usually develop over several days. Some children may be covered in spots; others have only a few or even none. The rash starts off looking like red spots, which then blister, and then scab over.
- Loss of appetite or feeding problems.

### **Is it serious?**

Chicken pox is generally not dangerous and the spots do not usually scar unless they are badly scratched. Occasionally, some spots can become infected with germs (bacteria.) This is the most common complication in children. If this occurs, the surrounding skin becomes red and sore. Antibiotics in the form of creams or medicine may then be needed.

Complications are rare, however, signs of a more serious problem can include:

- Breathing problems
- Drowsiness
- Convulsions (fits)
- Weakness such as a child becoming wobbly on his/her feet.
- Pains or headaches that become worse despite paracetamol.
- Being unable to take fluids, due to a severe rash in the mouth.
- A severe rash, or a rash that bruises or bleeds into the skin (haemorrhagic rash).

**If your child develops any of these symptoms, seek immediate medical help.**

### **How does chicken pox spread?**

Chicken pox spreads when a person infected with the measles virus breathes, coughs, or sneezes. It is very contagious. Chickenpox can also be passed on by contact with the blisters that are caused by chickenpox and shingles.

### **How is measles treated?**

Treatment is mainly aimed at easing symptoms and trying to make your child as comfortable as possible whilst the immune system deals with the virus. Some children feel quite unwell for a few days. Others appear only mildly ill. Most are much better within a week. The blisters dry up and scab. They gradually fade, but may take up to two weeks to go completely. The self-care techniques listed below may help.

- Paracetamol and ibuprofen can be used to reduce a high temperature (fever) and treat any aches or pains.
- If your child's high temperature is causing them distress, you can also try to reduce it by keeping them cool. A cool (but not cold) compress, such as a damp flannel held to their forehead, can help.
- If your child has a high temperature, make sure they drink plenty of fluid because they may be at risk of dehydration.
- Keep fingernails cut short to stop deep scratching.
- Dress comfortably to prevent irritation or overheating.
- Correct dosage of antihistamine is recommended to help ease the itching.
- For itchy skin, topical calamine lotion and cooling gels can be soothing.
- There are several products recommended to add into bath water that can help relieve the itching these include: half to one cup of bicarbonate of soda, porridge oats in a tied up sock or an oatmeal-based bath product.

**If your symptoms don't improve after ten days, or suddenly worsen, contact a doctor for advice.**