

Chicken Pox in Pregnancy

Description:

- Chicken Pox (Varicella) is caused by a virus. It used to be a common childhood illness. Now with vaccination available It is not so common.
- In children the illness is usually mild with a widespread rash. The rash initially begins as small blisters. The blisters then change into pustules. Eventually they become scabs or crusts. The rash is very itchy.
- If children are allowed to pick the scab off they will be left with a scar. Many of us have the tell tale signs of a scratched chicken pox mark.
- An adult may also have a fever with muscle aches and tiredness.

How is it caught?

Chicken Pox is very contagious. The spread is by droplets in the air. One of the reasons it is so contagious is that a person is contagious for 1 – 2 days prior to their spots breaking out. They continue to be contagious until the last spot has formed a scab. The incubation period is 10 -21 days. You can have immunity wither through having had chicken pox or through vaccination.

It is rare to contract chicken pox more than once. If this does happen you should contact your doctor or midwife promptly.

What happens if I come into contact?

If you are unsure if you have had chicken pox in the past or don't know if you have been immunised you need to check with your doctor or midwife. You will be required to have a blood test to see if you have any antibodies to the virus.

If the contact was less than 24 hours and if you don not have immunity, you will be offered zoster immune globulin (ZIG). If you receive this injection in time there is a good chance you will not become infected with the virus.

What risks are there to my baby?

- The majority of babies that are born to women who have contracted chicken pox in pregnancy are normal.
- However 1 – 2% of the babies will have one or more birth defects due to the infection.

- The biggest risk period for birth defects is between 8 and 20 weeks gestation.

How to protect my other children?

Ensure that you have the available information and have your children vaccinated.

What is Shingles (Herpes Zoster)?

Shingles is a very painful rash that can appear on any part of the body. The chicken pox virus causes it. The virus remains inactive in nerve cells in your body after the initial infection. It may occur at any age. Quite often when you are under a lot of stress. Most commonly it occurs after 50 years of age.

An adult with shingles can be infectious to others who are non-immune to the chicken pox virus.