

Coping with Chickenpox

Chicken pox can occur anytime during the year but hits it's peak in late winter and spring. If your child has not yet been immunized against chicken pox, they are at risk of catching the illness.

The incubation period for chicken pox is 2 to 3 weeks from the time that they are exposed. If a child receives the vaccine within 5 days of being exposed to the virus, it will usually protect them. If your child does develop chicken pox, there is now a treatment to help shorten the illness and make it milder, without interfering with the development of life-long immunity.

Zovirax, a prescription anti-viral medication, can shorten the course of the illness from the usual 7 to 8 days to about 4 days. It also decreases the number of "crops" of pox which decreases the chances of scarring. To be effective, however, it must be started within 24 hours of the beginning of the illness!

The first child in a family usually has a milder illness, probably because they received a low dose of virus during a brief encounter with a classmate or stranger. Subsequent illnesses in siblings are usually much worse, with many more pox, because they receive a much heavier dose of virus from a sibling in the household.

Treatment: Cool baths, loose clothing, Tylenol or Motrin for fever can be helpful. Never use aspirin in children with chicken pox (or any viral illness) because of the danger of developing Reyes syndrome, a rare but deadly disease.

Antihistamines, like Benadryl, are helpful in relieving the itch, but *never combine the use of oral Benadryl with Caladryl lotion!* Children absorb the antihistamine in Caladryl through the skin, which, when combined with oral Benadryl, can lead to a serious overdose.

As a matter of fact, we never recommend Caladryl lotion, believing that playing with boats in the tub is just as effective in soothing the skin, and much more fun.

If you have questions or concerns, please call our office.