



Chickenpox and Pregnancy

What is chickenpox?

- Caused by the varicella-zoster virus
- Most common in children and usually mild; however, when adults get it, they can be very sick.

What are the signs and symptoms?

- Chickenpox begins with a fever, tiredness loss of appetite or headache followed in a day or two by a very itchy rash.
- The rash starts with red spots that turn into fluid-filled blisters. New blisters may form during the next few days, and after a few days, crusts form over the blisters.

How is it spread?

- Spreads easily through the air or by touching the fluid in a chickenpox blister.
- The virus usually takes 14-16 days to develop, but may take anywhere from 10-21 days after contact with an infected person.
- Chickenpox is contagious 1-2 days before the rash appears and at least 5 days after.

What you need to know if you are pregnant

- Pregnant women who have never had chickenpox can develop severe illness if they get chickenpox while pregnant.
- Chickenpox can also affect the developing baby if the mother becomes infected in the first half of pregnancy. The newborn baby can also develop severe chickenpox if the mother develops the rash 5 days before, to 2 days after delivery.
- If you are pregnant, have been in contact with someone who has chickenpox and think you may not have had chickenpox, consult your doctor as soon as possible.
- A blood test can determine if you have antibodies to protect you from the virus.
- If the blood test shows no antibodies, you may be advised to receive an injection of varicella-zoster immune globulin (VZIG) to help prevent severe infection.



What about the chickenpox vaccine?

- The varicella vaccine is available to prevent chickenpox.
- It should NOT be used in pregnancy.
- Women who receive the vaccine should wait three months to become pregnant. (CDC) - Canada's Immunization Guide: "Pregnancy should be avoided for at least 4 weeks after vaccination"
- A reliable form of birth control must be used during this time
- Women who have not had chickenpox as determined by a blood test, and are considering a future pregnancy should receive the vaccine.

For further information visit the Haldimand Norfolk Health Unit's website at www.hnhu.org

References: Public Health Agency of Canada - Immunization Guide.

CDC - Centres for disease control and prevention www.cdc.gov. Adapted with permission by Brant County Health Unit.

Updated July 2018