

Chickenpox and measles

Take rashes seriously

Chickenpox

Chickenpox is a mild disease that most children catch at some point. The spots often look like mosquito bites and can appear on any part of the body (see opposite page). After having chickenpox, the virus stays in the body and can come back later in life in a different form known as shingles.

Chickenpox is easy to pass on to someone who has not had it before. If your child has chickenpox keep them away from others.

Chickenpox can be incredibly itchy, but it's important for children to not scratch the spots so as to avoid future scarring. One way of stopping scratching is to keep fingernails clean and short. You can also put socks over your child's hands at night to stop them scratching the rash as they sleep.

If your child's skin is very itchy or sore, try using calamine lotion or cooling gels. These are available in pharmacies and are very safe to use. They have a soothing, cooling effect.

Children should stay off school until all the spots have crusted over. This usually takes about five days. Keep your child well hydrated with plenty of fluids.

Measles

Measles is a very infectious illness. About one in five children with measles experiences complications such as ear infections, diarrhoea and vomiting, pneumonia, meningitis and eye disorders. One in 10 children with measles ends up in hospital. There is no treatment for measles. Vaccination is the only way of preventing it. If your children have not yet had the **MMR vaccination**, do not delay. Speak to your health visitor.

Measles often starts with cold-like symptoms. Your child may develop red eyes and sensitivity to light, a high temperature, and greyish white spots in the mouth and throat. After a few days, a red-brown spotty rash will appear. This usually starts behind the ears and then spreads around the head and neck before spreading to the rest of the body. Once the rash starts, your child will need to rest and you can treat the symptoms until your child's immune system fights off the virus. If there are no complications due to measles, the symptoms will usually disappear within 7-10 days.

Closing curtains or dimming lights can help reduce light sensitivity.

Damp cotton wool can be used to clean away any crustiness around the eyes. Use one piece of cotton wool per wipe for each eye. Gently clean the eye from inner to outer lid.

Health visitor says

Do not forget to keep up-to-date with immunisations to protect your child from measles (MMR vaccination).

Midwife says

If you are pregnant and have had chickenpox in the past it is likely that you are immune to chickenpox. However, please contact your GP or midwife for advice.

Painkillers

If your child is in pain or has a high temperature (fever), you can give them a mild painkiller, such as paracetamol.

Always read the manufacturer's dosage instructions. **Do not give aspirin to children under the age of 16.**