

CHICKENPOX AND PREGNANCY

What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is also called varicella (var-e-sel-a). It is an infection caused by the varicella zoster virus. Signs of chickenpox are fever and an itchy rash.

How do you get chickenpox?

Chickenpox is spread easily from one person to another by touching or through the air. The virus can be spread by coughing, sneezing, or by touching the rash or skin lesions. A person with chickenpox can spread the disease 1-2 days before the rash appears and until all blisters have formed scabs. After someone is exposed, it takes from 10-21 days to develop chickenpox. To keep you and your baby healthy, avoid direct contact with anyone who has chickenpox.

What are the risks of chickenpox?

A pregnant woman can become very sick if she contracts chickenpox. The most serious risk for the pregnant woman is contracting Varicella (Chickenpox) Pneumonia. If Varicella Pneumonia is not treated, it can lead to death. Pregnant women with chickenpox are very contagious and can expose both the baby and anyone else she may encounter. The unborn baby is at greatest risk when mom becomes infected with chickenpox during the first 20 weeks of pregnancy.

How can I protect myself from chickenpox before becoming pregnant?

You are at risk for getting chickenpox if you have never had chickenpox or have not received the varicella vaccination. If you are at risk for getting chickenpox, you need to get the vaccine before becoming pregnant. If you are not sure if you had the vaccine or had the chickenpox, talk to your doctor or nurse. A simple blood test can be done to check if you are protected from chickenpox.

How do I know if I have chickenpox?

An early sign is fever. Within a few days, a rash begins that looks like small red pimples. The rash usually begins on the stomach, chest and back and then spreads to the head, face, arms, and legs. The pimples become blisters which can be very itchy. The blisters open and scabs form.

What do I do if I am pregnant and think I have chickenpox?

Call your doctor, midwife, or nurse practitioner immediately. Medicine can be given to you to treat chickenpox and to prevent complications.

If I am pregnant and have not had chickenpox or the vaccine, what should I do after my baby is born?

Get the first dose (shot) of the varicella vaccine before you go home from the hospital. It is very important to get the second shot 4-6 weeks later when you have your follow-up, or postpartum exam. **You need both shots before you are fully protected, so be sure you get the second dose.** If you have signs of chickenpox after your baby is born, call your doctor or nurse right away.

Other Resources: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/varicella/public/index.html>