**Chickenpox**

**Introduction**

Chickenpox is a highly contagious disease. It is caused by the varicella-zoster virus. The same virus can cause herpes zoster. Chickenpox is an infectious disease that occurs worldwide and it can affect people of all ages. However, it is mainly a childhood disease as infection will offer lifetime immunity.

**Mode of Transmission**

Chickenpox is spread from person to person by breathing in airborne respiratory droplets from an infected person’s cough or sneeze. It can also be spread through direct contact with the fluid of the blisters of the infected person’s skin.

**Signs and Symptoms**

Chickenpox usually begins as an itchy rash with multiple red small bumps that progress very rapidly to small blisters with clear yellowish fluid inside. The skin lesions come in successive waves and in the end, lesions of all different stages of development can be found on the infected person’s skin at the same time. The skin lesions of chickenpox are usually quite itchy and uncomfortable. They tend to distribute randomly all over the body, from head to toes, and no part of the skin can be spared.

Some infected people may also experience symptoms such as fever, headache and runny nose. The rash will usually clear up on its own within three weeks (although...
most of the cases are cleared in one week).

Because of the intense itchiness of the rash, scars usually result from the scratching and excoriation of the skin lesions. Once formed, scarring is permanent. Therefore, every effort should be deployed to prevent scratching and scar formation.

The infection process is self-limiting in most children, unless in those with chronic illness or immuno-compromised. On the other hand, adults infected with chickenpox will usually have more severe signs and symptoms. For unknown reason, adults infected with chickenpox have a high chance of developing complications, such as encephalitis and pneumonitis.

Multiple Small Blisters with Clear Fluid

Management and Prevention

Treatment of chickenpox is just supportive and symptomatic in uncomplicated cases. Anti-pyretics, such as paracetamol, may be given to the infected person to reduce the pain and discomfort from fever. **Aspirin should never be used in cases of chickenpox.**
because of the possible linkage to Reye’s syndrome (which is life threatening). Oral non-sedating antihistamines, such as loratadine and fexofenadine, may be used to help to ease the itchiness of the skin lesions. However, nothing is as effective as trimming the finger nails short in preventing scar formation in scratching. Oral antiviral agents, such as acyclovir and famciclovir, may be considered in adult patients or in patients who are immuno-compromised. Management of these patients require expert advice.

Chickenpox is now a preventable disease with vaccination of a live attenuate vaccine. It may be given to children older than one year old. A booster dose of the same vaccine is recommended when the children reach four to six years old. It is a safe and effective vaccine.

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