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## **Important Medical Information for Parents**

### **Scabies and Chickenpox**

We have been notified of a suspected case of Scabies & one of Chickenpox today within the school. For your information here is the current information from NHS Direct:

#### **Scabies**

**Scabies is a contagious skin condition caused by tiny mites that burrow into the skin.** The main symptom of scabies is intense itching that's worse at night. It also causes a skin rash on areas where the mites have burrowed.

#### **Scabies mites**

Scabies mites are called *Sarcoptes scabiei*. They feed using their mouths and front legs to burrow into the outer layer of skin (epidermis), where they lay eggs.

After three to four days, the baby mites (larvae) hatch and move to the surface of the skin, where they mature into adults.

Scabies like warm places, such as skin folds, between the fingers, under fingernails, or around the buttock or breast creases. They can also hide under watch straps, bracelets or rings.

#### **How scabies is spread**

Scabies is usually spread through prolonged periods of skin-to-skin contact with an infected person, or through sexual contact.

It's also possible – but rare – for scabies to be passed on by sharing clothing, towels and bedding with someone who's infected.

It can take up to eight weeks for the symptoms of scabies to appear after the initial infection. This is known as the incubation period.

#### **Scabies outbreaks**

In developed countries, scabies outbreaks can sometimes occur in places where there are lots of people, such as schools, nurseries and care homes.

In the UK, most outbreaks of scabies occur in the winter. This may be because people tend to spend more time indoors and closer to each other at this time of year.

It's difficult to know exactly how many cases of scabies there are in the UK. This is because many people don't visit their GP and treat the condition with non-prescription medicines.

#### **Treating scabies**

Visit your GP if you think you have scabies. It's not usually a serious condition, but it does need to be treated.

The two most widely used treatments for scabies are permethrin cream and malathion lotion (brand name Derbac M). Both medications contain insecticides that kill the scabies mite.

Permethrin 5% cream is usually recommended as the first treatment. Malathion 0.5% lotion is used if permethrin is ineffective.

#### **Complications of scabies**

Scabies can sometimes lead to a secondary skin infection if your skin becomes irritated and inflamed through excessive itching.

Crusted scabies is a rare but more severe form of scabies, where a large number of mites are in the skin. This can develop in older people and those with a lowered immunity.

#### **Chickenpox**

**Chickenpox is a mild and common childhood illness that most children catch at some point.**

It causes a rash of red, itchy spots that turn into fluid-filled blisters. They then crust over to form scabs, which eventually drop off.

Some children have only a few spots, but other children can have spots that cover their entire body. These are most likely to appear on the face, ears and scalp, under the arms, on the chest and belly, and on the arms and legs.

Chickenpox (known medically as varicella) is caused by a virus called the varicella-zoster virus. It's spread quickly and easily from someone who is infected.

Chickenpox is most common in children under the age of 10. In fact, chickenpox is so common in childhood that over 90% of adults are immune to the condition because they've had it before. Children usually catch chickenpox in winter and spring, particularly between March and May.

### **What to do**

To prevent spreading the infection, keep children off nursery or school until all their spots have crusted over. Chickenpox is infectious from one to two days before the rash starts, until all the blisters have crusted over (usually five to six days after the start of the rash).

If your child has chickenpox, try to keep them away from public areas to avoid contact with people who may not have had it, especially people who are at risk of serious problems, such as newborn babies, pregnant women and anyone with a weakened immune system (for example, people having cancer treatment or taking steroid tablets).

### **Chickenpox treatment**

Chickenpox in children is considered a mild illness, but your child will probably feel pretty miserable and irritable while they have it.

Your child may have a fever for the first few days of the illness. The spots can be incredibly itchy. There is no specific treatment for chickenpox, but there are pharmacy remedies that can alleviate symptoms. These include paracetamol to relieve fever, and calamine lotion and cooling gels to ease itching. In most children, the blisters crust up and fall off naturally within one to two weeks.

### **When to see a doctor**

For most children, chickenpox is a mild illness that gets better on its own.

However, some children can become more seriously ill with chickenpox and need to see a doctor.

Contact your GP straight away if your child develops any abnormal symptoms, such as:

- if the blisters on their skin become infected
- if your child has a pain in their chest or has difficulty breathing

### **Chickenpox in adults**

Chickenpox may be a childhood illness, but adults can get it too. Chickenpox tends to be more severe in adults than children, and adults have a higher risk of developing complications.

As with children, adults with chickenpox should stay off work until all the spots have crusted over. They should seek medical advice if they develop any abnormal symptoms, such as infected blisters.

Adults with chickenpox may benefit from taking antiviral medicine if treatment is started early in the course of the illness..

### **Who's at special risk?**

Some children and adults are at special risk of serious problems if they catch chickenpox. They include:

- pregnant women
- newborn babies
- people with a weakened immune system

These people should seek medical advice as soon as they are exposed to the chickenpox virus or they develop chickenpox symptoms.

They may need a blood test to check if they are protected from (immune to) chickenpox.

Chickenpox occurs in approximately 3 in every 1,000 pregnancies. It can cause serious complications for both the pregnant woman and her baby.

### **Chickenpox and shingles**

Once you have had chickenpox, you usually develop antibodies to the infection and become immune to catching it again. However, the virus that causes chickenpox, the varicella-zoster virus, remains inactive (dormant) in your body's nerve tissues and can return later in life as an illness called shingles. It's possible to catch chickenpox from someone with shingles, but not the other way around.

For more information: [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)