

This leaflet gives general advice. For further information please ask either the nursing or medical staff who are providing your care and treatment or contact the Infection Control Team on 01386 502552.

If you would like this leaflet in a different language, larger print size, in audio, Braille or any other format please contact the

PALS team by phone on

☎01905 760020;

by letter ✉ Communications,  
Worcestershire Health and Care Trust,  
Isaac Maddox House, Worcester

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## CHICKEN POX AND SHINGLES

*What is it?*

*Your questions answered*

**An Information Leaflet for  
Patients and Staff**

## **WHAT IS IT?**

Chicken Pox and Shingles are both caused by the same virus (germ) — Varicella Zoster

## **HOW DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE HAS IT?**

Chicken Pox usually begins with the sudden onset of a slight fever (temperature), feeling unwell and an itchy rash starting with flat spots which become raised and filled with fluid. The rash is usually on the body more than on the face or limbs. Spots occur in successive groups and scab over 3-4 days after appearing.

Shingles is characterised by pain and spots on one side of the face or body. It commonly affects adults but incidences in childhood may occur.

## **IS IT INFECTIOUS?**

YES, chicken pox is commonly spread from person to person as the virus is shed from the nose or throat as droplets or by direct contact. Chicken pox is infectious from approximately 2 days before until 5 days after the spots appear.

It is possible to get chicken pox from contact with a person with shingles (the fluid in the spots is infectious). You do not however, get shingles from having contact with a person with chicken pox. Shingles only occurs in people who have had chicken pox themselves in the past and in whom the virus becomes active again.

## **WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF SOMEONE HAS THE ILLNESS?**

The person affected should rest whilst they have the fever and discomfort. Keep a person cool by reducing the amount of clothing or bedding and by giving paracetamol as prescribed on the bottle/packet. Use a calamine-based lotion or cream on spots to soothe itching. Wash hands after touching or treating the spots. Shingles can be treated with a drug that kills the virus. Some anti-viral drugs may not be licensed for use in children.

## **ARE MY FAMILY OR FRIENDS AT RISK FROM CHICKEN POX?**

Yes, they could be if they haven't had it before. The person infected with the chicken pox or shingles should avoid contact with new-born babies, pregnant women, and those people who are immunosuppressed, e.g. those with leukaemia, cancer, AIDS or those having chemotherapy, or steroids by mouth or injection. If a woman does not remember having chicken pox before but gets it during pregnancy or is in contact with someone else who has chicken pox, she should seek medical advice.

## **HOW SOON CAN THE PERSON RETURN TO THE WORK/CARE SETTING?**

A person with chicken pox should stay away for five days after the first spots have appeared and they feel well again. A person with shingles may return to work/care setting if the spots are covered and they are well enough to do so.