



## Varicella (Chicken Pox) Vaccine

The varicella vaccine protects against chickenpox disease. It is recommended that all children get two doses of the vaccine. It will reduce a child's chance of getting chickenpox, and reduce the severity of the disease if he/she does get chickenpox.

### What is chicken pox?

Chicken pox is caused by the varicella-zoster virus. People with chicken pox will feel flu-like symptoms such as fatigue, mild headache, fever up to 39°C (102°F), chills and muscle or joint aches a day or two before an itchy, red rash appears. The rash appears anywhere on the body as raised red blisters that are extremely itchy. Some children have only a few blisters while others can have as many as 500. These blisters dry up and form scabs in four to five days. The person will be most infectious (contagious) from one to two days before the rash appears. Chicken pox spreads quickly from person to person through the air from coughs and sneezes or through touching a blister or the liquid from a blister. A pregnant woman with chicken pox can pass it on to her unborn child before birth.

### Why is varicella vaccine important?

Chicken pox infection can lead to more serious problems such as:

- bacterial skin infections and/or necrotizing fasciitis (“flesh-eating disease”)
- pneumonia (infection of the lungs)
- ear infections
- encephalitis (infection of the brain)
- other infections (ex. blood)
- birth defects may occur if the unborn baby gets chicken pox from his/her mother

Chicken pox can be very severe or even life-threatening to newborn babies and anyone with a weak immune system.

### Who is eligible to receive publicly funded varicella vaccine?

Children born on or after January 1, 2000 and are at least one year of age are eligible to receive 2 doses of varicella vaccine. Children born on or after January 2010 require varicella vaccine to attend school. The routine schedule of immunization recommends that children receive the first dose of varicella vaccine at 15 months of age and the second dose as MMRV (measles, mumps, rubella and varicella vaccine) at 4 to 6 years of age. Children, who have received two doses of MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine and one dose of varicella vaccine, will receive a second dose of the single varicella vaccine. In addition, people with medical conditions that put them at increased risk for complications due to chicken pox are also eligible. These people include:

- children and adolescents given chronic salicylic acid therapy
- people with cystic fibrosis
- immunocompromised individuals – the vaccine (a live, attenuated vaccine) is recommended for some immunocompromised persons, but contraindicated for others. Please discuss this with your health care provider.

**Are there side effects from the vaccine?**

Most reactions tend to be mild and include some soreness, redness, itching and/or rash where the needle was given. A low-grade fever (38°C) may occur. Some children may get a very mild case of chicken pox one or two weeks after they get the vaccine but are not likely to be contagious. **Severe reactions are rare. Please report any side effects or severe vaccine reaction to your doctor/nurse practitioner or local public health unit.**

Do not give aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid, ASA) for pain or fever after vaccination. The use of aspirin has been associated with an increased risk of Reye's syndrome (a severe disorder of the liver and brain) after vaccination.

**Who should not get the vaccine?**

People should not receive the vaccine if they:

- have allergies to the vaccine or any component of the vaccine (neomycin, gelatin)
- have already had chicken pox disease
- had an anaphylactic reaction to a prior dose of the vaccine.
- have received blood or blood products up to 5 months ago
- are pregnant

Special consideration is needed for people with weakened immune systems or those on medications to suppress their immune systems. Consult your health care provider. **You should always discuss the benefits and risks of any vaccine with your doctor/nurse practitioner or local public health unit.**

**When should I call my health care provider?**

Call your doctor/nurse practitioner or go to the nearest hospital emergency department if your child has any of the following symptoms within three days of getting the needle:

- hives
- swelling of the mouth and throat
- trouble breathing, hoarseness or wheezing
- high fever (over 40°C or 104°F)
- convulsions or seizures
- other serious reaction to the vaccine.

**Who should I talk to if I have any questions?**

For more information please contact your doctor/nurse practitioner or Renfrew County and District Health Unit Health Info Line at 613-735-8666 or 1-800-267-1097 Ext. 666.

**Your record of protection**

After you get any immunization, make sure your personal immunization record (Yellow Card) is updated. Keep it in a safe place!

**Renfrew County and District Health Unit**

7 International Drive  
Pembroke, Ontario K8A 6W5  
613-735-8666 or 1-800-267-1097, Ext. 666.

Adapted from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Immunization: Chickenpox (February 2014)

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