



# Varicella (Chickenpox ) Vaccine

Getting vaccinated is the best way to protect against some very serious infections. The Canadian Pediatric Society and the National Advisory Committee on Immunization strongly recommends routine immunization. This vaccine protects persons from chickenpox disease.

## What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is an illness caused by the Varicella-Zoster virus. A virus is a kind of germ that can make people sick. People with chickenpox get a fever and itchy spots on their skin. The spots are like small water blisters. Some people have only a few blisters. Others can have as many as 500. These blisters dry up and form scabs in four or five days. Anyone who has had chickenpox may develop shingles later in life.

## How is chickenpox spread?

Chickenpox spreads very quickly.

- It spreads from person to person through direct contact. You can get chickenpox if you touch a blister or the liquid from a blister. You can also get chickenpox if you touch the saliva of a person who has chickenpox. The virus can get into your nose or mouth and make you sick also.
- It can also spread through the air if you are near someone with chickenpox who is coughing or sneezing.
- A pregnant women with chickenpox can pass it on to her baby before birth.
- Mothers with chickenpox can also give it to their newborn babies after birth.

## How common is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is less common since the varicella vaccine has become available. The vaccine has reduced the incidence of complications caused by chickenpox.

## Can chickenpox cause bigger problems?

If the blisters get infected, they may leave disfiguring scars or result in flesh eating disease or septicaemia (serious blood infection).

Children with chickenpox may develop pneumonia or serious brain infection with lasting health problems or death.

Babies who get chickenpox from their mothers before birth could be born with birth defects. Some examples of these birth defects are skin scars, eye problems or arms and legs that are not fully formed. Chickenpox can be very severe or even life-threatening to newborn babies, adults and anyone who has a weak immune system.

## Who can get the chickenpox vaccine?

You can protect yourself or your child from chickenpox disease by getting vaccinated. In Ontario it is recommended that children 15 months of age receive their first dose of the chickenpox vaccine. The second dose will be offered to children between 4 to 6 years of age as part of the MMRV vaccine which protects against measles, mumps, rubella (german measles) and varivax (chicken pox). However, if the child is between 1 to 11 years of age and already received two doses of MMR vaccine which protects against measles, mumps and rubella, as well as one dose of varicella, a second dose of chickenpox vaccine is recommended.

## Is the vaccine safe?

It is very safe. With any vaccine, there may be some redness, swelling or pain at the site it was given. Some people will get a very mild case of chickenpox one or two weeks after they get the vaccine. They will most likely have less than 50 spots. The chickenpox vaccine can be given at the same time as the MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine.

## Who should NOT have the chickenpox vaccine?

- Babies less than one year old.
- People with weak immune systems and people who are taking drugs to suppress their immune system. (Sometimes these people can get the vaccine, but they should talk to their doctor about this).
- Women who are trying to get pregnant. They should talk to their doctor first.
- People who have a known allergy to a component of the vaccine.

- People who have had chickenpox disease do not need to get the vaccine. They are most likely immune to it now. If they do get the vaccine, it will not hurt them.

## Record of Protection

After you/your child receive any vaccination, make sure the doctor updates your copy of the yellow vaccination record card. In addition, please report the vaccination to the Public Health Unit by calling, mailing, faxing or reporting online at [www.hnhu.org](http://www.hnhu.org). Click on the Immunization Reporting button and complete the information.

For more information, please contact a member of the Vaccine Preventable Disease Team by calling the Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit at 519-426-6170 or 905-318-6623.

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