

Important Information about **Chickenpox** and Varicella Vaccine

PLEASE READ THIS CAREFULLY

What is Chickenpox?

- Chickenpox is a common childhood disease caused by the varicella virus.
- It usually causes a mild fever followed by an itchy rash.
- On rare occasions it can lead to severe illness and hospitalization; it can be life threatening.
- It can be more severe in adolescents and adults.
- It can cause serious illness during pregnancy both for mother and baby.
- Chickenpox is spread easily from person to person, through the air, saliva, or liquid from the blisters.
- It is more common during late winter and early spring.
- It is preventable through immunization.

What is Varicella Vaccine?

- Varicella vaccine contains a tiny amount of live virus that is specially treated so that it won't cause the disease in healthy people.
- It is a very safe vaccine that gives about 97% protection from chickenpox.
- The vaccine is given by an injection.
- A single dose is required for children between 12 months and 12 years of age.
- Two doses — four weeks apart — are required for people 13 years and older.

Who Should Receive the Varicella Vaccine?

The Nova Scotia schedule recommends that this vaccine be given to

- babies 12 months of age
- children between the ages of 1 and 12 years who have not had chickenpox or who have not had the vaccine already
- anyone living in a household or caring for someone whose immune system is weak or damaged by disease or medication and who has not had chickenpox already
- all health-care workers who could catch chickenpox or spread chickenpox to others during the course of their work and who have not had chickenpox already
- women who are either planning a pregnancy or who recently had a baby and have not had chickenpox.

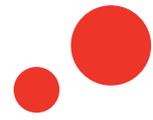
CAUTION

Who Should NOT Receive the Varicella Vaccine?

- Babies less than 1 year old
- People whose immune systems are weak because of disease or certain medications (unless their specialist recommends it)
- This vaccine is not recommended for pregnant women. If a woman wishes to get this vaccine, she should ideally wait at least 1 month before getting pregnant.
- People who have severe allergies to neomycin or gelatin
- People who have had an anaphylactic reaction to any vaccine ingredients
- Anyone who has had immunization with a live vaccine (such as the vaccine for measles, mumps, and rubella) within one month. However, two live vaccines can be given on the same day.
- People who have already had chickenpox, even a mild case.

Please read other side.

What to Expect Following Immunization with **Varicella Vaccine**



INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

Your child has received varicella vaccine. This vaccine is important in protecting your child from chickenpox.

People should stay in the clinic for at least 15 minutes after receiving any type of immunization to monitor possible reaction. As with any vaccine there is a slight possibility that a more serious reaction could occur.

What Are Possible Side Effects of the Varicella Vaccine?

- The most common side effects from this vaccine are redness, swelling, and mild pain at the injection site.
- Some may get a mild fever and a few chickenpox-like spots 1 to 2 weeks after vaccination. (The rash should be covered if your child may be in contact with someone who has a weak immune system.)
- On rare occasions, a severe allergic reaction may occur.

As fever may occur, make sure you have acetaminophen or ibuprofen at home. Follow the instructions that come with the product. These medications should not be taken if you have certain medical conditions. Talk to your health care provider about your medical history before using either of these medications.

Fever Management

A fever is not necessarily bad, but it may make your child uncomfortable.

If you think your child has a fever

- Take your child's temperature.
- If the temperature is over 38.5°C (101°F), you may give your child an antipyretic medicine that will help control the fever, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen.
- You may wish to ask your pharmacist which form of medicine is best for your child and how much to give.
- Give the correct dose for your child's weight every 4 to 6 hours and NOT more often.
- Encourage your child to drink extra fluids, such as water.

NOTE:

Acetaminophen and ibuprofen come in 3 forms for young children:

- drops—which MUST be given with the dropper provided with the brand of medicine
- liquid—given using a teaspoon or a 5-mL measure
- chewable tablet—which can be given to children old enough to chew and swallow food when asked

Call Your Health Care Provider If

- The fever lasts longer than 24 hours.
- Your child's temperature is 39.5°C (103°F) or greater.
- The fever does not come down after acetaminophen or ibuprofen is taken.

Questions?

If you have any questions about chickenpox or varicella vaccine, please call your local Public Health Services office or your health care provider.

For more information on immunization, please visit the websites of

- the Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness at www.immunize.cpha.ca
- the Public Health Agency of Canada at www.phac-aspc.gc.ca
- the Canadian Pediatric Society at www.cps.ca