Varicella (Chickenpox) (VZ) Vaccine

Immunization protects you from disease. Get protected, get immunized.

- **Vaccines make your immune system stronger by building antibodies, which help prevent diseases.**
- **Immunization is very safe. It's much safer to get immunized than to get this disease.**

Who should have the varicella (VZ) vaccine?

- VZ vaccine is given to all children starting at 12 months of age.
- VZ vaccine is also given to older children or adults who haven't had chickenpox or the vaccine.

How many doses of VZ vaccine are needed?

- People need 2 doses of VZ vaccine. The first is given at 1 year of age. The second is given between 4 and 6 years of age. These doses are usually given using the MMR-Var vaccine, which is a combined vaccine that protects against chicken pox and measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR).
- The second dose of VZ vaccine was added to the immunization program in 2012 and is free for children born on August 1, 2005 or later. Children born before August 1, 2005 may benefit from a second dose. Talk to your doctor or a travel health clinic to find out more. You'll have to pay for the second dose. Check with your health insurance provider as some plans may cover the cost.

How well does the vaccine work?

- After 2 doses, the VZ vaccine is about 98% effective in preventing chickenpox disease.
- If children in Grades 1, 5, and 9 haven't had chickenpox or the recommended doses of the vaccine, they may be able to get the vaccine at school. Information about the disease and the vaccine will be sent to the parent/guardian. If you want your child to get the vaccine, you must fill out the consent form and return it to the school. When children are immunized at school, they don't need a blood test.

Where can I get the VZ vaccine?

- VZ vaccine can be given in a Public Health Office in your area. Anyone older than 13 years needs a blood test before the vaccine to check their immunity.
- If children in Grades 1, 5, and 9 haven't had the chickenpox or the recommended doses of the vaccine, they may be able to get the vaccine at school. Information about the disease and the vaccine will be sent home to the parent/guardian. If you want your child to get the vaccine, you must fill out the consent form and return it to the school. When children are immunized at school, they don't need a blood test.

Are there side effects from VZ vaccine?

Most people have no reaction. If reactions happen they're usually mild, within 6 weeks of getting the vaccine, and may include:

- redness, swelling, and/or discomfort where the needle was given
- fever
- a chicken pox-like rash

It's important to stay for at least 15 minutes after any immunization because rarely people can have a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis).

Unexpected or unusual reactions can happen after being immunized. Call Health Link at 811 to report any unusual reactions.

How can I manage side effects?

- To decrease discomfort and swelling, put a cool, moist cloth over the area.
- If you need medicine for fever or pain, check with your pharmacist or doctor. Don't give aspirin to anyone younger than 19 years old because it can cause serious health problems.
- If you get a chickenpox-like rash, keep it covered with clothing. If the rash can't be covered, stay away from pregnant women, newborn babies whose mothers haven't had chickenpox, and people with weak immune systems. If there are more than 50 spots, call Health Link at 811.
- Some people with health problems (e.g., weak immune system) must call their doctor whenever they get a fever. If you've been told to do this, you still need to call your doctor—even if you think the fever was caused by the immunization.

Is there anyone who can't have the VZ vaccine?

You may not be able to have the vaccine if you have:

- an allergy to any part of the vaccine—always tell your healthcare provider about allergies
- had a severe or unusual reaction after VZ vaccine or a vaccine with the same components—always tell your healthcare provider if you've had reactions
- you're pregnant—you have to wait until after you've had your baby
- you're planning to get pregnant—wait a month after getting VZ vaccine before you start trying to get pregnant
- you have a weak immune system—you need to check with your doctor before getting this vaccine
- you've had a blood product within the past year or another live vaccine within the past 3 months—check with a public health nurse as your vaccine may need to be delayed

You can still be immunized if you have a mild illness (e.g., cold), even if you have a fever.

For More Information

Call Health Link at **811**

Go to **immunizealberta.ca**

Go to **myhealth.alberta.ca**

Disease Quick Facts: Chickenpox (Varicella Disease)

Symptoms

- itchy rash that looks like small water blisters
- fever

How it spreads

- can spread before the rash appears
- spreads easily through the air when someone with the disease coughs or sneezes
- can spread directly from fluid in the rash

Risks

- usually a mild disease
- up to 1 out of 10 people with chickenpox can have skin infections, pneumonia, blood infections, or other life threatening infections
- complications are more common in teens, adults, and people with weak immune systems
- if a pregnant woman gets chickenpox, there's a small risk of her baby having birth defects
- if a woman gets chickenpox a few days before or after giving birth, her baby has a high risk of severe disease, which can lead to death

Other

- The virus can reactivate later in life and cause shingles (herpes zoster)
- VZ vaccine protects against chickenpox, but it doesn't prevent all cases of shingles.