Varicella Zoster Immune Globulin (VZIG)

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

- Immune Globulins are needed for fast but short term protection.
- For long term protection, get immunized.

**What is Varicella Zoster Immune Globulin (VZIG)?**
VZIG is made from blood and contains antibodies to the varicella zoster virus. This virus causes chickenpox and shingles. VZIG provides fast protection but is not long lasting.

For long lasting protection, immunization with chickenpox (varicella) vaccine is needed. At 50 years of age or older, Herpes Zoster (shingles) vaccine can be given to boost protection against shingles, but it is not free. Check with your health insurance provider as some plans may cover the cost.

**Who should have VZIG?**
VZIG is given after contact with the varicella zoster virus to unprotected people who are at risk for serious illness (weak immune system, pregnant woman, premature baby whose mother is not protected, newborn baby whose mother gets chickenpox within a few days of birth).

**How many doses of VZIG are needed?**
People need one dose of VZIG as soon as possible after contact with the virus. The size of the dose depends on the person’s body weight.

**How well does VZIG work?**
VZIG helps prevent chickenpox disease or helps prevent serious illness in those who do get disease.

**Is VZIG safe?**
VZIG is one of the safest blood products available. Canadian Blood Services carefully screens donors and tests all blood collected. The blood of donors is not used if the donor has known risk factors or tests positive for an infectious diseases. VZIG is treated with heat and chemicals to kill germs that might be present. The risk of getting an infection from VZIG is very small.

**Where can I get VZIG?**
Call Health Link at 811 if you have been in contact with chickenpox or shingles and you:

- are pregnant and have never had chickenpox disease, shingles or varicella (chickenpox) immunization
- have a weak immune system

If VZIG is needed, it will be given at your local public health office or hospital.

**Are there side effects from VZIG?**
Reactions to VZIG are usually mild and go away in a few days. They may include:

- bruising, itching, and discomfort where the needle was given
- headache, tiredness, body aches
- rash
- flushing, chills
- nausea

Hives and general swelling may occur.

It is important to stay for 15 minutes after VZIG is given because people can have a rare but serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis). If anaphylaxis happens, you will be given medicine to treat the symptoms.

Unusual reactions can happen. Call Health Link at 811 to report any unusual reactions.
How can I manage side effects?

- To help with discomfort and swelling, put a cool, wet cloth over the area.
- If you need fever or pain medicine, check with your pharmacist or doctor. Do not give aspirin to anyone younger than 19 years old because it can cause serious health problems.
- Some people with health problems (e.g., weak immune system) must call their doctor whenever they get a fever. If you have been told to do this, call your doctor—even if you think the fever was due to immunization.

Is there anyone who cannot have VZIG?

Talk to your healthcare provider before having VZIG if you:

- have an allergy to parts of the immune globulin—always tell your healthcare provider about allergies
- had a severe or unusual reaction after this immune globulin (or a similar one)—always tell your healthcare provider if you have had reactions
- have an IgA deficiency

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

VZIG can interfere with live vaccines. You need to wait at least 5 months after having VZIG before you can have a live vaccine, including chickenpox vaccine. If you had a live vaccine less than 14 days before having VZIG, ask a public health nurse if the live vaccine needs to be repeated.

For More Information

- Call Health Link at 811
- Go to immunizealberta.ca
- Go to myhealth.alberta.ca

Disease Quick Facts:

**Varicella (Chickenpox)**

- virus that causes fever and an itchy rash that looks like small water blisters
- usually mild but up to 1 out of 10 people can have skin infections, pneumonia, blood infections, or other life threatening infections
- newborns, adults, and people with weak immune systems have the most serious infections
- if a pregnant woman gets chickenpox, there is a small risk of miscarriage or birth defects
- if a woman gets chickenpox a few days before or after giving birth, her baby has a high risk of severe disease, or death
- spread easily through the air by coughing, sneezing or by touching open blisters
- can spread before the rash appears

**Herpes Zoster (Shingles)**

- after having chickenpox, the virus remains in the body. It can become active again and cause shingles (herpes zoster)
- most often appears as a painful patch of blisters on one side of the body
- 1 out of 5 adults can have burning pain that lasts long after the blisters disappear. In the elderly, this increases to 1 out of 3
- anyone who had chickenpox can get shingles, but it is most common in older adults and people with weak immune systems
- shingles is less common and less serious in people who had varicella (chickenpox) vaccine
- a person who is not protected against chickenpox can get chickenpox disease by touching a shingles rash