

## 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?

There can be side effect from VZIG, but they tend to be mild and go away in a few days. Side effects may include:

- bruising, itching, or feeling sore where you had the needle
- feeling tired
- headache
- chills
- body aches
- feeling sick to your stomach (nausea)
- rash
- flushing

Hives and general swelling may occur.

It is important to stay for 15 minutes after you have VZIG. Some people may have a rare but serious allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. If anaphylaxis happens, you will get medicine to treat the symptoms.

It is rare to have a serious side effect. Call Health Link at 811 to report any serious or unusual side effects.

## How can I manage side effects?

- To help with soreness and swelling, put a cool, wet cloth over the area where you had the needle.
- There is medicine to help with fever or pain. Check with your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure what medicine or dosage to take. Follow the directions on the package.
- Children under the age of 18 years should **not** take aspirin because it can cause serious health problems.
- Some people with health problems, such as a weak immune system, must call their doctor if they get a fever. If you have been told to do this, call your doctor even if you think the fever is from the vaccine.

## Who should not have VZIG?

Talk to your healthcare provider before having VZIG if you:

- have an allergy to parts of the immune globulin
- had a severe or unusual side effect after this immune globulin or one like it
- have an IgA deficiency

Check with your doctor or public health nurse before you get VZIG.

You can still have VZIG if you have a mild illness such as a cold or fever. Always tell your healthcare provider if you have allergies or if you have had a side effect from an immune globulin in the past.

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](https://www.immunizealberta.ca)



Go to [MyHealth.Alberta.ca](https://www.myhealth.alberta.ca)

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# Facts about varicella (chickenpox) and herpes zoster (shingles)

## What is varicella (chickenpox)?

Chickenpox is a virus that can cause a fever and an itchy rash that looks like small water-filled blisters. It spreads easily through the air by coughing, sneezing, or touching open blisters.

It is usually mild, but can be more serious in newborns, adults, and people with weak immune systems. Up to 1 in 10 people who get chickenpox can have:

- skin infections
- pneumonia
- blood infections
- other life-threatening 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.

## What is herpes zoster (shingles)?

After having chickenpox, the virus remains in the body. It can become active again and cause herpes zoster (shingles). It most often appears as a painful patch of blisters on one side of the body.

- One 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.