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

- Vaccines make your immune system stronger. They build antibodies to help prevent diseases.
- Immunization is safe. It is much safer to get immunized than to get this disease.

What is the VZ vaccine?
The VZ vaccine protects against chickenpox (varicella).

Who should have the VZ vaccine?
The following people should have VZ vaccine:
- children starting at age 12 months
- younger babies who are age 6 to 11 months who have certain health problems
- anyone born before August 1, 2012, who has never had chickenpox (Adults need a blood test to check if they need the vaccine.)
- children born on or after August 1, 2012, who missed getting this vaccine as babies (They may need this vaccine even if they have already had chickenpox.)

How many doses do I need?
Children born on or after August 1, 2005, need 2 doses of VZ vaccine - the first at age 12 months and the second at age 4 years. Doses given before you are age 12 months do not count as part of the 2 doses.

Anyone born before August 1, 2005, need 1 or 2 doses of VZ vaccine depending on when they got their first dose. Ask a public health nurse to find out how many doses you or your child needs.

Are there other vaccines that protect against chickenpox?
Doses of VZ are usually given to babies and children as part of the MMR-Var vaccine. This is a vaccine that protects against measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) and chickenpox (Var) together.

How well does the vaccine work?
The protection is about 94% after 1 dose and about 98% after 2 doses.

Where can I get the VZ vaccine?
Students in Grades 1 to 9 who have not had chickenpox or the recommended doses can get the VZ vaccine in school. Parents and guardians will get information about chickenpox and the vaccine. If you want your child to get the vaccine in school, you must fill out the consent form and return it to the school.

Older teens or adults who are not protected can have the VZ vaccine for free at a public health office.

If you or your child want a second dose and you cannot get it for free, you need to pay for it. Contact a travel health clinic (e.g., AHS Travel Health Services) or talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

Are there side effects from the VZ vaccine?
There can be side effects from the VZ vaccine. They tend to be mild and go away in a few days, but side effects can happen up to 6 weeks after having this vaccine. They may include:
- redness, swelling, or feeling sore where you had the needle
- fever
- feeling itchy
- a chickenpox-like rash (water-filled blisters) or a rash without water-filled blisters

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

It is rare to have a serious side effect after a vaccine. 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.
• If you get a rash that looks like chickenpox, keep it covered. If you cannot cover the rash, stay away from pregnant people, newborn babies, and people with weak immune systems. If you have more than 50 spots, call Health Link at 811.
• 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 VZ vaccine?**
You may not be able to have the vaccine if you:
• have an allergy to parts of the vaccine
• had a severe or unusual side effect after this vaccine or one like it
• have a weak immune system (due to medicine or a health problem) or a family history of a weak immune system
• had a blood product in the past 12 months
• had another live vaccine in the past 3 months
• are pregnant
Check with your doctor or a public health nurse before you get the vaccine.

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**Facts about varicella (chickenpox)**

**What is chickenpox?**
Chickenpox is a virus that causes fever and an itchy rash that looks like small, water-filled blisters. It is usually mild, but up to 1 in 10 people who get chickenpox can have:
• skin infections
• pneumonia
• blood infections
• other life-threatening infections

After you get chickenpox, the virus stays in your body. It can become active again and cause shingles (a painful skin rash). VZ vaccine protects against chickenpox, but it does not prevent all shingles.

**Who is most at risk?**
People with the highest risk of serious infections from chickenpox are:
• newborns
• adults
• people with weak immune systems

If you are pregnant and get chickenpox, there is a small risk of miscarriage or the baby could be born with disabilities. If you get chickenpox a few days before or after you have your baby, the baby has a high risk of getting very sick or dying.

**How it spreads?**
Chickenpox spreads easily through the air by coughing, sneezing or touching open blisters. You can spread chickenpox before you get the rash.

You can still have the vaccine 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 a vaccine in the past.

If you are planning to get pregnant, you need to wait 1 month after having this vaccine before you start trying to get pregnant.

**For More Information**

- Call Health Link at 811
- Go to ImmunizeAlberta.ca
- Go to MyHealth.Alberta.ca