

## Varicella (Chickenpox) Vaccine (VZ)

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

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

#### Who should have varicella (VZ) vaccine?

This vaccine is given to children starting at 12 months of age.

It is given to infants 6 to 11 months of age who have certain health conditions.

It is given to older children and adults who have not had chickenpox or the vaccine. A blood test is needed for adults to check that they need the vaccine (are not protected).

#### How many doses of this vaccine are needed?

People need 2 doses of VZ vaccine. The first is usually given at 12 months and the second at 4 years of age. These doses are usually given using the MMR-Var vaccine, which is a combined vaccine that protects against chickenpox and measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR). Doses given before 12 months of age do not count.

The second dose of VZ vaccine at 4 years of age was added to the routine immunization schedule in 2012 for those born on or after August 1, 2005. Children who did not receive this second dose can have the vaccine for free. Older children may benefit from a second dose— check with a public health nurse to find out if it is free for your child.

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

#### Where can I get the vaccine?

VZ vaccine is offered to students in grades 1 to 9 who have not had chickenpox or the recommended doses of VZ vaccine. Information about the disease and the vaccine will be sent home to the parent or guardian. If you want your child to get the vaccine, you must fill out the consent form and return it to the school.

If you are an older teen or an adult whose blood test shows you are not protected, you can have the vaccine for free at a public health office in your area.

If you or your child does not qualify for a free second dose, 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 VZ vaccine?

Reactions to the vaccine are usually mild and go away in a few days. Reactions may happen up to 6 weeks after immunization. They may include:

- redness, swelling, and discomfort where the needle was given
- fever
- a chickenpox-like rash (water blisters)

It is important to stay at the clinic for 15 minutes after immunization 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.
- If you get a chickenpox-like rash, keep it covered. If the rash cannot be covered, stay away from pregnant women, newborn babies whose mothers have not 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 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 VZ vaccine?

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

- have an allergy to parts of the vaccine—always tell your healthcare provider about allergies.
- had a severe or unusual reaction after this vaccine (or a similar one)—always tell your healthcare provider if you have had reactions.
- are pregnant—you need to wait until after you have had your baby.
- have a weak immune system—you need to check with your doctor before getting this vaccine.
- had a blood product within the past 12 months or another live vaccine within the past 3 months—check with a public health nurse. Your vaccine may need to be delayed.

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

You need to wait 1 month after this vaccine before trying to get pregnant.

## For More Information



Call Health Link at 811



Go to [immunizealberta.ca](http://immunizealberta.ca)



Go to [myhealth.alberta.ca](http://myhealth.alberta.ca)

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# Disease Quick Facts: Chickenpox (Varicella)

## What it is

- 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
- after having chickenpox, the virus remains in the body. It can become active again and cause shingles (herpes zoster). VZ vaccine protects against chicken pox, but it does not prevent all cases of shingles

## Who is most at risk

- 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

## How it spreads

- spread easily through the air by coughing, sneezing or by touching open blisters
- can spread before the rash appears