

Varicella (VZ) Vaccine

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 get the VZ vaccine?

The following people should get the VZ vaccine:

- children starting at age 12 months
- younger babies who are age 6 to 11 months and are going to have an organ transplant
- anyone born before August 1, 2012, who has not had chickenpox (Adults need a blood test to check if they need the vaccine.)
- children born on or after August 1, 2012, who did not get this vaccine as a baby (They may need this vaccine even if they had chickenpox.)

How many doses do I need?

Children born on or after August 1, 2005, need 2 doses of the VZ vaccine. As of January 1, 2021, children get their first dose at age 12 months and the second dose at age 18 months. If your child did not get the VZ vaccine at age 18 months, they will get it at age 4 years. Any doses a child gets before age 12 months do not count as part of the 2 doses they need to protect them against chickenpox.

If you are born before August 1, 2005, you need 1 or 2 doses of the VZ vaccine. This depends on when you got your first dose. Ask a public health nurse to find out how many doses you or your child needs.

If you or your child want a second dose and cannot get it for free, you will need to pay for it. Contact a travel health clinic or talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

Are there other vaccines that protect against chickenpox?

There is an MMR-Var vaccine that protects against measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) and chickenpox (Var). Most babies and children get this vaccine as it protects them against chickenpox and these other diseases.

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?

You can get the vaccine at a public health office in your area.

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:

- a rash, redness, swelling, bruising, itching, or feeling stiff, numb, or sore where you had the needle
- a fever
- a chickenpox-like rash with 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 called 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 a fever or pain. Check with your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure what medicine or dose 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 anyone who is pregnant, 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 get the VZ vaccine?

You may not be able to get this vaccine if you:

- have an allergy to any part of the vaccine
- had a severe (serious) or unusual side effect after this vaccine or one like it
- have a weak immune system (because of medicine you take or a health problem)
- have 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

You can still get 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, wait 1 month after having this vaccine before you start trying to get pregnant.

Check with your doctor or a public health nurse before you get the vaccine.

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)

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 (a type of lung infection)
- blood infections
- other life-threatening (deadly) infections

After you get chickenpox, the virus stays in your body. It can become active again and cause shingles (a painful skin rash).

The VZ vaccine protects against chickenpox. It also helps lower your risk of developing 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 having a miscarriage or having a baby born with:

- a low birthweight
- eyesight (vision) problems
- scars on the skin
- birth defects (such as poor development of the brain or an arm or leg)

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.