

## What if I do not remember if I had chickenpox?

If you are 12 years of age or younger it is safe to receive a dose of chickenpox vaccine even if you are unsure if you had the disease.

If you are 13 years of age and over you should see your doctor to have a blood test done. This will tell if you already have protection against chickenpox.

If the blood test shows you do not have protection, you should be immunized as soon as possible.

## What are the possible side effects of the vaccine?

- There may be some redness, swelling and pain at the site of the needle.
- Some people will get a rash, which looks like a very mild case of chickenpox, one to two weeks after they get the vaccine.
- As with any vaccine, there is a remote chance of a severe allergic reaction.

## What should you do if there is a reaction to this vaccine?

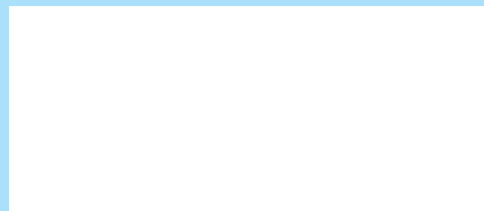
- For pain or swelling where the needle was given, place a cool damp towel on the area.
- For pain or fever, give acetaminophen (also called Tylenol ®) as directed on the container.

**NOTE: Acetylsalicylic acid (ASA or Aspirin®) is not recommended for persons less than 18 years of age because of the increased risk of Reye's syndrome.**

Call your local public health nurse if you have questions or if there is an unusual reaction to this vaccine.

## For more information

Call your local public health office.



Chickenpox (varicella) vaccine?

# Chickenpox (varicella) vaccine

Important information about this vaccine

Government of Alberta ■

## What is Chickenpox (varicella)?

Chickenpox is a common disease of childhood caused by the varicella virus. It causes an itchy rash which looks like small water blisters. It is highly contagious. Most people who get chickenpox recover with no lasting effects, but a number of people develop complications.

## How is chickenpox spread?

Chickenpox spreads easily from person to person.

It can spread through the air when a person is in the same room with someone who has chickenpox. It may also be spread by someone who has the disease even before the typical rash breaks out.

You can also become infected through contact with liquid from a chickenpox blister or saliva from a person with the disease.

A pregnant woman with chickenpox can pass it on to her baby before birth or to her newborn baby.

## What problems can chickenpox disease cause?

- If the blisters get infected, people may be left with disfiguring scars.
- Chickenpox can lead to pneumonia or problems with other organs such as the brain, the liver and the heart.
- Pregnant women who get chickenpox may give birth to babies with birth defects such as skin scars, eye problems, or incompletely formed arms or legs.

- Chickenpox can be very severe or even life threatening to newborn babies, adults, and those who have weak immune systems.
- Chickenpox virus can reactivate later in life to cause shingles, a painful rash that can be very severe, especially in the elderly.

## About the vaccine:

Chickenpox vaccine contains a tiny amount of the chickenpox virus, which has been specially treated so that it will not cause disease in healthy people. It is given by needle and is a very safe vaccine. It gives about 97% protection from chickenpox. Those who do not get complete protection usually develop much milder disease if they are exposed to the chickenpox virus.

- Children from 1 to 12 years of age need one dose.
- Anyone 13 years of age and older need 2 doses, 4 weeks apart.

It can be given at the same clinic visit as the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine (in the other arm).

## Who should get the chickenpox vaccine?

- All children at 12 months of age - even if they had chickenpox disease before their first birthday.
- Anyone living in a household or caring for someone whose immune system is weak or damaged by disease or medications.
- Women who have recently had a baby and whose blood tests indicate they have not already had chickenpox disease.

- All healthcare workers who have the potential to acquire chickenpox disease or transmit chickenpox disease to others during the course of their work.

Although it will cause no harm, there is no reason to give this vaccine if a person has already had chickenpox disease or chickenpox vaccine after one year of age.

## Who should *not* get the vaccine?

- Babies less than one year old.
- People whose immune systems are weak or damaged from disease or certain medications unless their specialist recommends it.
- Women who are pregnant, or trying to get pregnant. Women should not get pregnant for at least one month after getting the chickenpox vaccine.
- People who have severe allergies to neomycin or gelatin or any other component of this vaccine.
- Anyone who has had immunization with a live vaccine (such as measles, mumps and rubella) within one month. However, it is all right to have immunization with another live vaccine on the same day as chickenpox immunization.
- People who have previously had chickenpox or chickenpox vaccine, after one year of age, as they likely already have protection.