

# Varicella (Chickenpox) Vaccine

## What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a very infectious disease caused by the varicella-zoster virus. It is passed from person to person through coughing, sneezing, and even talking. You can also get chicken pox if you touch a blister or the liquid from a blister then touch your mouth, nose or eyes.

Children with the infection will feel sick with fatigue, mild headache, fever up to 39°C, chills and muscle or joint aches a day or two before the red rash begins. The raised itchy red blisters can be anywhere on the body and dry up and form scabs in four to five days. Chickenpox can also cause complications such as bacterial skin infections, pneumonia and encephalitis (swelling of the brain).

## Who should get the vaccine?

Varicella vaccine is a live virus vaccine licenced for use in anyone over one year of age. Two doses are required for long term protection. Chickenpox can be more severe in adults, pregnant women, newborns and those who have weakened immune systems.

Children born on or after January 1, 2000, who are at least 12 months of age, are eligible to receive the publicly funded vaccine.

In addition, people with the following medical conditions that put them at increased risk for complications due to chickenpox will also be eligible:

- Children and adolescents on chronic salicylic acid (aspirin) therapy
- People with cystic fibrosis
- Immunocompromised people—this should be determined on an individual basis

## Varicella vaccine

Children at 15 months of age will be offered their first vaccine dose as part of the routine childhood immunization program.

The second dose will be offered to children at four years of age in the form of the MMRV (measles, mumps, rubella and varicella) vaccine.

If your child has already had two doses of the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine and one dose of the chickenpox vaccine and was born on or after January 1, 2000, he/she is still eligible for a second dose of the chickenpox vaccine.

It is estimated that varicella vaccine offers 70–90 per cent protection against chickenpox of any severity. The second dose of the vaccine is estimated to offer 98–99.9 per cent protection against chicken pox.

Most people who get the vaccine will not get chickenpox. If someone who has been vaccinated dose get chickenpox, it is usually very mild. They will have fewer blisters, are less likely to have a fever and will recover faster.

Immunity (protection from disease) is boosted if exposed to someone with chickenpox disease.

## Who should NOT get the vaccine?

- Children under 1 year—safety and effectiveness is not known
- anyone with an allergy to a component of the vaccine including latex (varilrix), neomycin, gelatin, MSG
- Women who are pregnant (avoid pregnancy for one month after vaccination)
- Persons who are immunosuppressed (due to cancer treatment, leukemia, lymphoma, HIV, etc., or receiving drugs that lower the immune system)
- Persons who have had blood transfusions or immune globulin (including varicella zoster immune globulin) in the past 10 months

## Side effects:

- Reactions are usually mild and may include redness and tenderness at the injection site and/or low grade fever
- A small number of persons (7–8%) will develop a mild chickenpox-like rash (2–5 spots) within two to four weeks after vaccination
- In persons who develop a rash, there is a slight risk of spread of the virus to those who are immunosuppressed (less than 1%). However, the illness is very mild because the vaccine virus is weakened

## When should I seek medical attention?

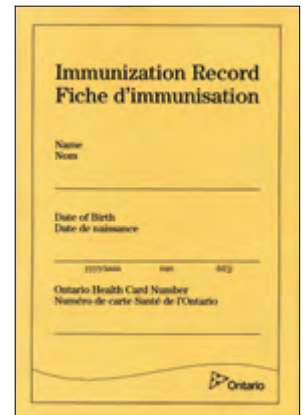
If you develop hives, swelling of the face or mouth, trouble breathing, serious drowsiness or other serious problems seek immediate medical attention.

## Your record of protection

After any immunization, ensure your personal immunization record or “yellow card” is updated. Keep it in a safe place.

## Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or contact Public Health at 519-575-4400.



Accessible formats of this document are available upon request.

## Region of Waterloo Public Health

*Infectious Diseases, Dental and Sexual Health*