



## Chickenpox (Varicella) Vaccine

**Keep your child safe.  
Get all shots on time.**

By getting all shots on time, your child can be protected from many diseases over a lifetime.

Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other health measure.

### What is the chickenpox vaccine?

The chickenpox vaccine protects against chickenpox infection. The vaccine is approved by Health Canada.

The chickenpox vaccine is provided free as part of routine immunizations. Call your local public health nurse or doctor to make an appointment.

### Who should get the chickenpox vaccine?

The chickenpox vaccine is given to children as a series of 2 doses or shots. The first dose is given at 12 months of age. Beginning January 1, 2012 a second dose is given at 4 to 6 years of age. The vaccine is given at the same time as other childhood immunizations.

Chickenpox Vaccine	Child's Age at Vaccination
1 dose	12 months
2 dose	4-6 years

The vaccine is also provided free as a series of 2 doses to people 13 years of age or older who have not been immunized or do not have evidence of immunity to chickenpox. The second dose is given 6 weeks after the first dose.

Those who had chickenpox before their 1<sup>st</sup> birthday, should still get the vaccine as they may not have developed a long lasting immunity and could get chickenpox again. However, it is not necessary for those who had chickenpox at 1 year of age or older to get the vaccine.

It is important to keep a record of all immunizations received.

### Benefits of Chickenpox Vaccine

The chickenpox vaccine is the best way to protect your child against chickenpox and its complications.

About 3 out of 20 children may get chickenpox even after being immunized. This illness will be much milder than if they had not been immunized.

When you get your child vaccinated, you help protect others as well.

### Possible Reactions after the Vaccine

Vaccines are very safe. It is much safer to get the vaccine than to get chickenpox.

Common reactions to the vaccine may include soreness, redness and swelling where the shot was given. A mild fever and a rash, which looks like chickenpox but with fewer spots, can occur about 2 weeks after the vaccine.

Very rarely, an immunized person who develops a rash after vaccination can spread the virus from the chickenpox vaccine to others. To prevent spreading the virus to others the rash should be covered until the blisters have dried and crusted over.

Acetaminophen or Tylenol® can be given for fever or soreness. ASA or Aspirin® should NOT be given to anyone under 20 years of age due to the risk of Reye Syndrome.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this happens after you leave the clinic, call 9-1-1 or the local emergency number. This reaction can be treated, and occurs in less than 1 in a million people who get the vaccine.

It is important to always report serious or unexpected reactions to your health care provider.

### Who should not get the chickenpox vaccine?

Speak with a public health nurse or doctor if you or your child:

- have had a life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of chickenpox vaccine, or any component of the vaccine including neomycin or gelatin
- have an immune system weakened by disease or medical treatment
- have had a blood transfusion or received other blood products within the past 12 months,
- have active untreated tuberculosis
- or if you are pregnant.

### What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is an infection caused by the varicella-zoster virus. Most people get infected with chickenpox during early childhood. Children with chickenpox can have an average of over 350 red, itchy blisters. Infection in teenagers, adults and those with weakened immune systems is more severe.

Complications from chickenpox include pneumonia (lung infection), encephalitis (swelling of the brain), and bacterial infections of the skin. Encephalitis can lead to convulsions, deafness or brain damage. About 1 in 3,000 adults will die from the infection.

The virus is easily spread through the air by sneezing and coughing. It can also be spread through contact with the fluid from chickenpox blisters.

For some people, the virus can become active again later in life and cause a painful rash called shingles. For more information on chickenpox or shingles, see HealthLink BC Files [#44a Facts about Chickenpox](#) or [#111 Shingles vaccine](#).

### Mature minor consent

It is recommended that parents or guardians and their children discuss consent for immunization. Efforts are first made to seek parental/guardian or representative consent prior to immunization. However, children under the age of 19, who are able to understand the benefits and possible reactions for each vaccine and the risk of not getting immunized, can legally consent to or refuse immunizations.

For more information on immunizations visit Immunize BC at [www.immunizebc.ca](http://www.immunizebc.ca).

For more HealthLink BC File topics, visit [www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles) or your local public health unit.

Click on [www.HealthLinkBC.ca](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca) or call **8-1-1** for non-emergency health information and services in B.C.

For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.



ImmunizeBC



BC Centre for Disease Control  
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