

# PROTECTION FROM VARICELLA (CHICKENPOX)

## What is the Chickenpox (varicella) vaccine?

The chickenpox vaccine protects against varicella-zoster virus infection, the virus that causes chickenpox. The vaccine contains a weakened form of the virus that does not cause disease.

## How is Chickenpox spread?

The virus is easily spread through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It can also be spread through contact with fluid from the chickenpox blisters of an infected person.

## Why do we recommend vaccination for Chickenpox?

Immunization is the best protection against chickenpox. Immunization will also help protect others as well. This is especially important with varicella immunization since it helps to protect pregnant women and their unborn babies as well as immune-compromised individuals who either cannot be immunized with the varicella vaccine or who may experience serious complications if they come into contact with the varicella virus. Although rare, some people may get chickenpox even after being immunized; however the illness will be much milder than if they had not been immunized.

Your Public Health Nurse will discuss with you the number of doses you require since this will depend on your age and your previous chickenpox immunization history.

## Who should NOT get the Chickenpox vaccine?

- Anyone who has had a severe allergic reaction to a previous dose of the varicella vaccine, or to any of the other contents of the vaccine (ex. gelatin, neomycin).
- Those with their immune system weakened by disease or medical treatment.
- Anyone who had a blood transfusion or received other blood products within the past 12 months.
- Anyone sick with high fever or infection.
- Women who are pregnant. Women should avoid pregnancy for one month after they get the varicella vaccine.

## Is the Chickenpox vaccine safe?

All vaccines recommended by the Public Health Agency of Canada and the Provincial Department of Health and Community Services are safe and effective. It is much safer to get the vaccine than to get chickenpox.

## What are the vaccine's common side effects?

Common reactions to the vaccine may include soreness, redness and swelling where the vaccine was given. A mild fever and a rash, which looks like chickenpox but with fewer spots, can occur about 2 weeks after the vaccine. Spread of chickenpox through the fluid in these blisters is possible. Serious Side effects are rare and should be reported to the community/public health nurse.

**Acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®) can be given for fever or soreness. ASA (e.g. Aspirin®) should not be given to anyone under 18 years of age due to the risk of Reye Syndrome.**

**For additional information and  
services contact the Regional Health  
Authority in your community.**