

## 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 disease. 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?

Children 12 months of age and older should get the vaccine. It is also for people of any age who have not had chickenpox or have not received the vaccine.

Children from 12 months to 12 years of age get one dose of the vaccine.

Chickenpox Vaccine	Child's Age at Vaccination
1 dose	12 months to 12 years

People 13 years of age or older get two doses. The second dose is given four weeks after the first dose.

Chickenpox Vaccine	Person's Age at Vaccination
1 <sup>st</sup> dose	13 years or older
2 <sup>nd</sup> dose	4 weeks after 1 <sup>st</sup> dose

If your baby had chickenpox before their 1<sup>st</sup> birthday, they should still get the vaccine as they may not have developed a long lasting immunity and could get chickenpox again.

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 disease and its complications.

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 two weeks after the vaccine.

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.

With chickenpox disease, children can have on average, 350 or more red, itchy blisters.

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 911 or the local emergency number. This reaction can be treated, and occurs in less than one in a million people who get the vaccine.

**Report serious or unexpected reactions to your public health nurse or doctor.**

### 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
- an immune system weakened by disease or medical treatment
- a blood transfusion or received other blood products within the past 12 months,
- 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. Infection in teenagers, adults and those with weakened immune systems is more severe.

Complications from chickenpox include pneumonia (lung infection) and encephalitis (swelling of the brain), and bacterial infections of the skin. Encephalitis can lead to convulsions, deafness or brain damage. About 1 in 5,000 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 BC HealthFile [#44a Facts about Chickenpox](#).

### Mature Minor Consent

Effort is made to seek parental or guardian consent prior to immunization. Children under the age of 19 who are able to understand the risks and benefits may consent to or refuse immunizations, regardless of the parent's or guardian's wishes. It is recommended that parents/guardians and their minor children discuss immunizations beforehand, and ask the nurse or doctor any questions.

For more BC HealthFile topics visit [www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm](http://www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm), or visit your local public health unit.

Call the BC NurseLine to speak to a registered nurse, available 24-hours every day:

- In Greater Vancouver, call 604-215-4700
- In BC, call toll-free 1-866-215-4700
- Deaf and hearing-impaired, call 1-866-889-4700
- Pharmacist available 5pm to 9am every day
- Translation services in over 130 languages upon request.

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