

## Vaccine Information Statement

### **Chickenpox (Varicella) Vaccine: What you need to know**

Many Vaccine Information Statements are available in Spanish and other languages. See [www.immunize.org/vis](http://www.immunize.org/vis)  
Hojas de información sobre vacunas están disponibles en español y en muchos otros idiomas. Visite [www.immunize.org/vis](http://www.immunize.org/vis)

#### **1. Why get vaccinated?**

Chickenpox (also called varicella) is a very contagious disease. It is caused by a virus called varicella-zoster. Chickenpox is usually mild, but it can be serious, especially in babies under 12 months of age, adolescents, adults, pregnant women, and people with weakened immune systems.

Chickenpox causes an itchy rash that usually lasts about a week. It can also cause:

- high fever
- tiredness
- loss of appetite
- headache

More serious complications can include:

- pneumonia
- infection or swelling of the brain
- skin infections
- blood stream, bone, or joint infections

Some people get so sick that they need to be hospitalized. It doesn't happen often, but people can die from chickenpox.

Children who get chickenpox usually miss 5 or 6 days of school or childcare.

People who get chickenpox often get a painful rash called shingles years later.

Chickenpox can spread easily from an infected person to anyone who has never had chickenpox or gotten chickenpox vaccine.

Chickenpox vaccine can prevent chickenpox.

#### **2. Chickenpox vaccine**

Chickenpox vaccine is a live-virus vaccine, meaning that the varicella-zoster virus has not been killed, but it has been weakened so it won't cause chickenpox.

You should get two doses of chickenpox vaccine.

For **children under 13 years of age**, these doses are recommended at:

- 12 through 15 months of age (first dose), and
- 4 through 6 years of age (second dose).

The second dose may be given earlier, but at least 3 months after the first dose.

**People 13 years of age or older** who didn't get the vaccine when they were younger, and have never had chickenpox, should get 2 doses at least 28 days apart.

For anyone who has gotten only 1 dose, it is never too late to get the second dose.

Chickenpox vaccine may be given at the same time as other vaccines.

This vaccine protects most people – but not everyone – from getting chickenpox. If someone who has been vaccinated does get chickenpox, it is usually very mild. They will have fewer blisters, are less likely to have a fever, and will recover faster.

### 3. Some people should not get this vaccine

Tell the person who is giving you the vaccine:

- **If you have any severe, life-threatening allergies.**  
If you ever had a life-threatening allergic reaction after a dose of chickenpox vaccine, or have a severe allergy to any part of this vaccine, you may be advised not to get vaccinated. Chickenpox vaccine contains gelatin and the antibiotic neomycin. *Tell your immunization provider if the person being vaccinated has any severe allergies.*
- **If you are pregnant.**  
Pregnant women should wait to get chickenpox vaccine until after they have given birth. Women should not get pregnant for 1 month after getting chickenpox vaccine.
- **If you have a weakened immune system because of**
  - HIV/AIDS or any other disease that affects the immune system
  - treatment with drugs that affect the immune system, such as steroids
  - cancer, or cancer treatment with x-rays or drugs
- **If you have recently had a transfusion or were given other blood products.**
- **If you have gotten another vaccine within the past 4 weeks.**  
Live vaccines given too close together might not work as well.
- **If you are not feeling well.**  
If the person scheduled for vaccination is not feeling well, your health care provider might decide to reschedule the shot on another day.

#### **4. Risks of a vaccine reaction**

With any medicine, including vaccines, there is a chance of reactions. Reactions to vaccines are usually mild and go away on their own, but serious reactions are also possible.

Most people who get chickenpox vaccine do not have any problems with it.

**Minor problems** following chickenpox vaccine include:

- Sore arm from the shot
- Fever
- Mild rash
- Temporary pain and stiffness in the joints

If you get a rash after vaccination, you can spread the disease to others. But, this is extremely rare. If you have a rash, you should stay away from people with weakened immune systems until the rash goes away.

**More serious problems** following chickenpox vaccination are extremely rare. They can include:

- Seizures (jerking or staring spell), including seizures caused by fever
- Severe rash
- Infection of lungs or liver
- Meningitis (infection of the brain and spinal cord coverings)

**Problems that could happen after any injected vaccine:**

- People sometimes faint after a medical procedure, including vaccination. Sitting or lying down for about 15 minutes can help prevent fainting, and injuries caused by a fall. Tell your doctor if you feel dizzy, or have vision changes or ringing in the ears.
- Some people get severe pain in the shoulder and have difficulty moving the arm where a shot was given. This happens very rarely.
- Any medication can cause a severe allergic reaction. Such reactions from a vaccine are very rare, estimated at about 1 in a million doses, and would happen within a few minutes to a few hours after the vaccination.

As with any medicine, there is a very remote chance of a vaccine causing a serious injury or death.

The safety of vaccines is always being monitored. For more information, visit:  
[www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/)

## 5. What if there is a serious reaction?

### What should I look for?

- Look for anything that concerns you, such as signs of a severe allergic reaction, very high fever, or unusual behavior.

Signs of a severe allergic reaction can include hives, swelling of the face and throat, difficulty breathing, a fast heartbeat, dizziness, and weakness – usually within a few minutes to a few hours after the vaccination.

### What should I do?

- If you think it is a severe allergic reaction or other emergency that can't wait, call 9-1-1 and get the person to the nearest hospital. Otherwise, call your doctor.
- Reactions should be reported to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS). Your doctor should file this report, or you can do it yourself through the VAERS web site at [www.vaers.hhs.gov](http://www.vaers.hhs.gov), or by calling **1-800-822-7967**.

*VAERS does not give medical advice.*

## 6. The National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program

The National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program (VICP) is a federal program that was created to compensate people who may have been injured by certain vaccines.

Persons who believe they may have been injured by a vaccine can learn about the program and about filing a claim by calling **1-800-338-2382** or visiting the VICP website at [www.hrsa.gov/vaccinecompensation](http://www.hrsa.gov/vaccinecompensation). There is a time limit to file a claim for compensation.

## 7. How can I learn more?

- Ask your healthcare provider. He or she can give you the vaccine package insert or suggest other sources of information.
- Call your local or state health department.
- Contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):
  - Call **1-800-232-4636 (1-800-CDC-INFO)** or
  - Visit CDC's website at [www.cdc.gov/vaccines](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines)

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