

Questions & Answers (Q&A) about Varicella Vaccination (Chickenpox)

Q. What is Chickenpox?

A. Chickenpox is a highly contagious infection caused by the varicella-zoster virus. It is usually a mild disease of short duration in healthy children. However, it is more severe in adults and can cause serious and even fatal illness in individuals who are immunosuppressed. 1 in 5,000 patients develop encephalitis and approximately 3 in 100,000 patients die. Infection during pregnancy can result in congenital malformations in the baby.

Q. Should my child be vaccinated?

A. The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) recommends a single dose of varicella vaccine is given to:

- All children aged 18 months, unless they have already received a dose of varicella vaccine or had a clinical history of chickenpox
- Children aged 10–13 years, unless they have already received a dose of varicella vaccine or had a clinical history of chickenpox
- In NSW this vaccine is given to students in the first year of high school

Children who have had chickenpox are considered immune and **do not** need to be vaccinated.

Q. Who should not receive varicella vaccine?

A. Varicella vaccine should not be given to:

- Individuals who are pregnant – pregnancy should be avoided for one month after vaccination
- Immunosuppressed individuals i.e.
 - (i) Individuals with AIDS
 - (ii) Individuals who are receiving, or have received, steroid therapy (including high dose oral steroids) and/or immunosuppressive therapy (including radiation) within the past 3 months.
- Those with anaphylactic reaction to any of the vaccine components
- Individuals who have received a blood transfusion / immunoglobulin injection within the past 3 months.
- Individuals who have received a live vaccine in past 4 weeks (eg. BCG (tuberculosis) or yellow fever)

Q. What if my child has asthma and takes cortisone or prednisone by a “puffer”?

A. It is safe to vaccinate children with varicella vaccine if they use a “puffer” for asthma.

Q. What is “anaphylaxis”?

A. “Anaphylaxis” is a severe allergic reaction that may result in unconsciousness and death if not treated quickly. It occurs *rarely* after vaccination.

The nurses are fully trained in the treatment of anaphylaxis.

Q. What are the components of the varicella vaccine?

A. The vaccine contains varicella zoster virus; amino acids; human albumin; lactose; neomycin sulphate; sorbitol and mannitol (additives used to stabilise the vaccine).

Q. How many doses of varicella vaccine does my child need to be vaccinated against chickenpox?

A. Children up to 13 years of age require one injection of varicella vaccine for immunity.

Q. Will my child require a booster dose of the vaccine?

A. Booster doses are currently not recommended.

Q. What are the side effects of vaccination?

A. Reactions are mild, such as fever (up to 39°C) and pain at the injection site. A ‘chickenpox-like rash’ (3–5%) may occur 5 to 26 days after vaccination. If a rash develops during the six weeks following vaccination exclusion from school is recommended for the duration of the rash.

Q. What should I do if I have no records or I cannot remember if my child has already had chickenpox or received varicella vaccine?

A. Children and adults can be vaccinated with varicella vaccine if there is an unreliable history of chickenpox, or if there is no available evidence of previous vaccination with varicella vaccine.

Q. My child has already had chickenpox as a child – does he/she need to be vaccinated?

A. No. Your child does not need to be vaccinated if he/she has already had chickenpox.

Q. What can I do if I do not wish my child to be vaccinated at school or if my child missed out on the vaccine at school because of illness or absence on the day the nurses' visit?

A. Whilst your child is in year 7 you can take your child to your GP to receive free varicella vaccine. It is advisable to inform the practice that your child requires varicella vaccination when making the appointment.

Q. Is vaccination compulsory for this campaign?

A. No. Parents/Guardians can choose whether or not to sign the Consent Form and have their child vaccinated. Only those children with a Consent Form completed and signed by a Parent/Guardian will be vaccinated.

All Parents/Guardians are asked to read the information provided and return the *signed* Consent Form. DO NOT return the consent form if you DO NOT wish your child to be vaccinated.

Q. Should I give my child a dose of paracetamol before going to school on the day of the clinic?

A. No. This is not necessary.

Q. Do homoeopathic preparations protect against chickenpox?

A. No. There is no evidence that homoeopathic preparations prevent chickenpox disease.

Q. Should the vaccine be given to a young woman who is or thinks she may be pregnant?

A. No. Any young woman who is or thinks she may be pregnant should not be vaccinated.

Q. Will I receive a record of the vaccination that my child received?

A. Your child will be given a record of vaccination. It is important that you advise your GP that this vaccination has been given, as universities, colleges, workplaces and other countries often require this information.

Please store this record in a safe place for future reference.

Q. Where can I find more information about immunisation?

A. The Australian Immunisation Handbook (current Edition) provides detailed information about immunisation. It can be found at www.immunise.health.gov.au

Q. Who can I contact if I wish to find out more information?

A. Contact your local Public Health Unit:

Greater Southern

(02) 6124 9942 or (02) 6021 4799
Queanbeyan Office Albury Office

Greater Western

(02) 6339 5601 or (02) 6841 5569
Bathurst Office Dubbo Office

(08) 8080 1499
Broken Hill Office

Hunter New England

(02) 4924 6477 or (02) 6767 8630
Newcastle Office Tamworth Office

North Coast

(02) 6588 2750 or (02) 6620 7500
Port Macquarie Office Lismore Office

Northern Sydney & Central Coast

(02) 9477 9400 or (02) 4349 4845
Hornsby Office Gosford Office

South Eastern Sydney & Illawarra

(02) 9382 8333 or (02) 4221 6700
Randwick Office Wollongong Office

Sydney South West

(02) 9828 5944 or (02) 9515 9420
Liverpool Office Camperdown Office

Sydney West

(02) 9840 3603 or (02) 4734 2022
Parramatta Office Penrith Office

Or visit: www.health.nsw.gov.au

Information about Chickenpox

Chickenpox is caused by a highly contagious virus, which produces a low-grade fever and rash. Re-activation of the virus later in life triggers shingles (herpes zoster virus).

1 in 5,000 people develop encephalitis (brain inflammation) and approximately 3 in 100,000 patients die following the disease.

Infection during pregnancy can result in congenital malformations of the baby. Infection of the mother just prior to the birth can also result in the baby being born with chickenpox disease.

Side effects of Varicella Vaccine

Side effects after varicella vaccination last only for a few days and are usually minor. They include soreness at the injection site and mild fever.

A mild chickenpox-like rash may develop in 3–5 percent of those who are immunised. If a rash develops during the six weeks following vaccination exclusion from school is recommended for the duration of the rash.

Serious side effects (such as anaphylaxis) are very rare.

What to do if reactions do occur

A cold damp cloth on the sore spot may help to relieve pain and tenderness. Paracetamol may be given for pain. Give extra fluids to drink.

If your child suffers a reaction or you are concerned, please contact your local Doctor.

Consent for Varicella Vaccination (Chickenpox)

Dear Parent / Guardian,

Teams of specially trained registered nurses will be visiting your child's school to offer a course of free varicella vaccine.

Varicella vaccine is recommended for all children in NSW at 12 years of age unless they have already received the vaccine or have had chickenpox.

If you wish your child to be vaccinated please complete all parts of this Consent Form and return it to the school.

The nurses will check your child on the day of the vaccination clinic. Children who are suffering from an acute illness with a fever will not be vaccinated.

If you have any questions regarding varicella vaccination or completing this form please contact your local Public Health Unit (listed in Q&A in 'Parent Information Kit').

INSTRUCTIONS:

Please complete all sections of this form with a blue/black pen.

Photocopies of this form will not be accepted.

If you wish to have your child vaccinated, complete all sections of this form and return it to the school within one week.

If you **DO NOT** wish to have your child vaccinated **DO NOT** return this form.

Varicella Consent Form

PARENT / GUARDIAN TO COMPLETE

Child's Surname

Child's Given Names Date of Birth

Name of School

Grade / Class

I have read and understood the information provided regarding the benefits and the possible side effects of the varicella (chickenpox) vaccine and I hereby give consent for my child, named above, to be vaccinated.

I declare that my son / daughter / ward:

- a) Has not had an anaphylactic reaction following any vaccine
- b) Does not have an anaphylactic sensitivity to any of the varicella vaccine components (listed in Q&A in the 'Parent Information Kit').
- c) Is not suffering from a disease which lowers immunity (Leukaemia/AIDS)
- d) Is not receiving treatment with cortisone/prednisone drugs or immunosuppressive therapy including radiation
- e) Is not allergic to the antibiotic neomycin
- f) Has not had a blood transfusion / immunoglobulin injection within the past 3 months
- g) Has not had a live vaccine in the past 4 weeks (eg. BCG (tuberculosis) or yellow fever)
- h) Is not pregnant

NAME OF PARENT/GUARDIAN

SIGNATURE OF PARENT/GUARDIAN

Home Address

Suburb Postcode

Phone Home Work

Mobile Date

Office Use Only – Nurse to complete and retain this section

Batch Number

Nurse Signature

Left Arm Right Arm

STAMP

Varicella Record of Vaccination

PARENT / GUARDIAN TO COMPLETE

Child's Surname

Child's Given Names

Name of School

Office Use Only

Left Arm

Right Arm

STAMP

Vaccine Batch Number

Nurse Signature

INSTRUCTIONS:

Women who have received varicella vaccine should not become pregnant for 28 days after vaccination.

Please keep this Record of Vaccination as you may be required to provide the information at a later date.

Advise your GP of the date that this vaccination was given so that your child's records are kept up to date.