

# Varicella (chickenpox) vaccine

## Parent Information Sheet

The Australian Government makes some vaccines free under the National Immunisation Program (NIP).

### Q. What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a very contagious illness caused by the varicella-zoster virus. It usually causes mild symptoms in healthy children, such as:

- a slight fever
- a runny nose
- feeling unwell
- a rash that turns into blisters.

Chickenpox can be more serious in adults or people with weak immune systems. In rare cases it can cause:

- loss of muscle movement (1 in 4,000 cases)
- brain inflammation (1 in 100,000 cases).

If a pregnant woman gets chickenpox, her baby may be born early or could have birth defects like scars or issues with their arms and legs.

### Q. How does chickenpox spread?

- Early in the illness, chickenpox spreads through coughing.
- Later, it spreads through contact with fluid from the blisters.

People with chickenpox can spread the virus:

- 1–2 days before the rash appears (during the runny nose phase)
- up to 5 days after the rash appears (until blisters form crusts).

### Q. How do vaccines work?

Vaccines help your immune system fight infections. If a vaccinated person gets exposed to these infections, their immune system can fight it better, either preventing the disease developing or making it less severe.

### Q. How effective is the chickenpox vaccine?

One dose of the vaccine prevents chickenpox in 80–85% of cases and is very effective against severe illness.

### Q. Who should get the vaccine?

- Children under 14 need one dose of the chickenpox vaccine unless they were already vaccinated (usually at 18 months) or had chickenpox.
- Children aged 14 and older need two doses, 1–2 months apart.

### Q. Who should not get the vaccine?

Do not give the vaccine to people who:

- had a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to a previous dose or an ingredient in the vaccine
- are pregnant (avoid pregnancy for 28 days after vaccination)
- had a blood transfusion or immunoglobulin injection in the past 12 months
- had a live vaccine (e.g., MMR, BCG, or yellow fever) in the past 4 weeks
- have a weak immune system, including:
  - people with HIV/AIDS
  - people receiving chemotherapy, radiation, or high-dose corticosteroids
  - people with severe immune problems like lymphoma or leukaemia.

### Q. What is anaphylaxis?

Anaphylaxis is a very rare but severe allergic reaction. It can cause unconsciousness or death if not treated quickly. Immunisation providers are trained to manage anaphylaxis.

**Q. What if I don't know if my child had chickenpox or the vaccine?**

If you are unsure, your child can still safely get the chickenpox vaccine.

**Q. What is in the chickenpox vaccine?**

The vaccine contains small amounts of:

- sucrose, gelatin, urea, and monosodium glutamate
- components of MRC-5 cells (used in vaccine production)
- traces of neomycin and bovine serum.

These ingredients help the vaccine work or preserve it. It was also exposed to bovine-derived materials during manufacturing.

**Q. How safe are vaccines?**

Vaccines in Australia are very safe. They must pass strict safety checks before approval by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). The TGA also monitors vaccine safety after use.

**Q. What are the side effects of the chickenpox vaccine?**

Side effects are usually mild and may include:

- redness, pain, or swelling where the shot was given
- fever.

Serious side effects are very rare. For more information, check the Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) at [health.nsw.gov.au/schoolvaccination](http://health.nsw.gov.au/schoolvaccination). If you are concerned about side effects, contact your GP.

**Q. Can pregnant students get the vaccine?**

No. Pregnant students should not get the vaccine.

On vaccination day, nurses will ask female students if they are or could be pregnant. If a student says yes, she will not be vaccinated. She will be advised to talk to her parent or doctor and will be given contact details for a support service.

Female students who receive the chickenpox vaccine should not become pregnant for 28 days after vaccination.

**Q. Who can give consent, and can it be withdrawn?**

Parents or guardians must give consent for students under 18. Students aged 18 and older can give their own consent by signing the Consent Form.

You can withdraw consent at any time by writing to the school or calling them.

**Q. What if my child missed the vaccine because they were sick or absent?**

If your child missed their vaccination at school, arrange a catch-up as soon as possible. Some schools offer catch-up clinics. If not, the school will provide a letter for your GP or pharmacist to complete the course.

**Q. How can I access a record of my child's vaccinations?**

Your child's vaccination record will be added to the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR).

Parents can request their child's Immunisation History Statement until the child turns 14. Students aged

14 and older can request their own record. You can access it:

- through your Medicare online account at [my.gov.au](https://my.gov.au)
- using the Medicare Express Plus App: [servicesaustralia.gov.au/express-plus-mobile-apps](https://servicesaustralia.gov.au/express-plus-mobile-apps)
- by calling the AIR General Enquiries Line at 1800 653 809.

**Q. What happens to my child's information?**

The information on the Consent Form is private and protected by law. It will be added to the NSW Health immunisation register and linked to the AIR so it can be viewed on MyGov.

**Q. Where can I find more information about school vaccination?**

You can find more details:

- on the NSW Health website: [health.nsw.gov.au/schoolvaccination](https://health.nsw.gov.au/schoolvaccination)
- by calling your local public health unit at 1300 066 055.

Your next steps:

- If you want your child to get the varicella vaccine, complete and sign the Consent Form. Return it to the school with your child.
- If you do not want your child to get the vaccine, do not provide consent.

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