



# Don't Wait, Vaccinate!

## Chickenpox (Varicella)

### What you should know about chickenpox



Source of photo: US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

#### What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox (varicella) is a virus that affects mostly children, spreads easily and is very contagious. People of all ages who get chickenpox can get very sick, especially those with a weakened immune system.

#### What happens when you have chickenpox?

A fever, headache, loss of appetite, and feeling unwell start 2 to 3 weeks after contact with an infected person. These symptoms last about a week and are followed by a blister-like rash on all areas of the body. Complications such as infections of the lungs, skin or brain can happen. After recovery, the virus remains in the body and can cause a painful illness called shingles later in life.

#### How does chickenpox spread?

The virus spreads through the air (when in the same room as someone with chickenpox) or by touching the rash. It can spread from 2 days before the rash starts and until all of the blisters have scabbed. A pregnant woman with chickenpox can pass it on to her baby. If you or your children have not been fully vaccinated and have never had chickenpox, you don't have protection against the virus and are at risk of getting and spreading chickenpox.

#### SYMPTOMS OF CHICKENPOX

- Fever
- Headache
- Runny nose
- Loss of appetite
- Body aches
- Feeling unwell
- Itchy, blister-like rash

#### COMPLICATIONS OF CHICKENPOX

- Severe skin infections
- Infection of the blood
- Infection of the lungs
- Infection or swelling of the brain
- Ear infections
- Malformations in infants (if mom was infected during pregnancy)
- Shingles
- Death

#### How do you avoid chickenpox?

**Immunization is the best way to protect yourself, your children and your community.**

If you have chickenpox, stay home for at least 5 days after the rash starts or until all the blisters have scabbed. Wash and disinfect articles that may have been in contact with the rash or any fluid from the nose or throat. Remember to wash hands often.

#### How is chickenpox found and treated?

Call your health care provider if your child doesn't eat, drink or play (especially with a high fever or a rash in the mouth), or if a chickenpox spot becomes swollen, red, or sore. Your health care provider can recommend ways to help relieve the symptoms of the illness. There is no cure for chickenpox.



# Don't Wait, Vaccinate! Chickenpox

## What you should know about the chickenpox vaccine

### What is the chickenpox vaccine?

Chickenpox (varicella) is included in the measles-mumps-rubella-varicella (MMRV) vaccine. There is also a specific chickenpox vaccine. These vaccines are part of the regular childhood immunization series. The choice of chickenpox vaccine depends on the province or territory you live in.

### How well does the chickenpox vaccine work?

After two doses of vaccine, protection is 98%!

Some people who get two doses of vaccine may still get chickenpox if they are exposed to the virus, but they are less likely to have severe symptoms.

### What are the benefits of this vaccine?

The chickenpox vaccine is safe, works well and is free. It's the best way to protect against chickenpox and its complications. Vaccination is safer than getting sick with chickenpox.

### Who should get the chickenpox vaccine?

The chickenpox vaccine is given in 2 doses in childhood. Timing of when it's given varies by province and territory. The chickenpox vaccine is also recommended for some people who did not have chickenpox or the vaccine in childhood.

### Where can I get the vaccine?

Call your health care provider or local Public Health Unit.

### What are the possible side effects of the chickenpox vaccine?

Most children are fine and have no reaction to the vaccine.

In some cases, your child may have some symptoms which are usually mild and don't last long. Your child's arm may be a bit red, sore or swollen where the injection went in. Some people may have a mild fever and a mild rash 1 to 2 weeks after the vaccine.

Talk to your health care provider about how to help relieve any symptoms after vaccination.

### Where can I get more information?

[Canada.ca/vaccines](http://Canada.ca/vaccines)

For information regarding reproduction rights, please contact:  
[CommunicationsPublications@canada.ca](mailto:CommunicationsPublications@canada.ca)

[www.canada.ca/indigenous-services-canada](http://www.canada.ca/indigenous-services-canada)  
1-800-567-9604 | TTY only 1-866-553-0554

QS-7144-000-EE-A1  
Catalogue: R5-725/2-2018E-PDF  
ISBN: 978-0-660-28485-9

©Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, 2018.

This publication is also available in French under the title:  
N'attendez pas, vaccinez! Varicelle

