



## New vaccines against chickenpox (varicella zoster virus): Varivax II®, Varivax III®, and Varilrix®



### What is varicella zoster disease (chickenpox)?

Chickenpox is caused by a virus called varicella zoster.

In most children, chickenpox is usually a mild illness with itchy blister-like rash, slight fever, and fatigue. Some develop skin infections or pneumonia. Scarring is also possible. Very rarely, the brain may become inflamed (“encephalitis”).

Chickenpox tends to be more severe in teens and adults. Newborn babies and people with a weak immune system are most likely to have severe — even life-threatening — illness. Babies who get chickenpox from their mother before they are born may have birth defects.

Each year in Canada, there are over 350,000 new cases of chickenpox. More than 1,800 patients need treatment in hospital, and about 3 per 100,000 die.

Later in life, about 1 in 5 people who had chickenpox as a child will suffer a painful rash (“shingles”).

### Is chickenpox contagious?

Chickenpox is very contagious. The virus is transferred by coughing or sneezing, or contact with skin sores.

Children with chickenpox usually miss a week of school or work. Parents often lose time from work to care for infected children.

### Can chickenpox be treated or prevented?

There is no cure. Some medications can make a case of chickenpox less severe. The best safeguard is to avoid being infected.

Some new vaccines help prevent infection. Their effect lasts for at least 10 years.

### Who should receive the vaccine?

Health Canada recommends vaccination of:

- all children 12 months or older
- teens and adults who have never had chickenpox
- people who have never had chickenpox and have been exposed in the past 3 days

### Who should not receive the vaccine?

The vaccine should not be given to:

- people who are allergic to any of its ingredients
- women who are pregnant or trying to get pregnant (pregnancy should be avoided for **at least** a month after the second shot)
- people taking steroid medications
- people with immune system problems such as HIV, AIDS, congenital deficiencies, or cancer

If your child has received blood or blood products recently, or is ill on the day of the planned vaccination, your doctor may delay the shot.

### Is the vaccine effective and safe?

Over 80% of people who receive the vaccine will avoid getting chickenpox. Another 15% will have a much milder case than if they had not been vaccinated.

The vaccine is safe for most people, except those mentioned above. Side effects may include a mild rash, and a few chickenpox marks at the injection site.

### How many shots are needed?

The number of shots needed depends upon the patient's age when the first shot is given. **One shot at 12 months of age is preferred.** Until 12 years of age, only one shot is needed. Anyone 13 years or older needs two shots (4 to 8 weeks apart).

### Who pays for the vaccine?

Some public health plans pay for the vaccine. So do some private insurance plans. If you have to pay yourself, each shot of vaccine may cost \$60 or more. You may need the “DIN number” to find out if your plan pays for the vaccine.

Vaccine	DIN number
Varivax II®	02240776
Varivax III®	02246081
Varilrix®	02241047

### How can I learn more?

Talk to your doctor. He or she may have other helpful information sheets. You can also find reliable information on the following Internet sites.

Canadian Health Network

[www.Canadian-Health-Network.ca](http://www.Canadian-Health-Network.ca) + Children + Immunization

Canadian Immunization Awareness Program

[www.Immunize.cpha.ca](http://www.Immunize.cpha.ca) + resources

Canadian Pediatric Society

[www.cps.ca](http://www.cps.ca)

American Academy of Family Physicians

[www.familydoctor.org](http://www.familydoctor.org) + kidshealth + search “immunizations” + varicella

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[www.cdc.gov/nip/](http://www.cdc.gov/nip/) + Parents Guide to Childhood Immunization

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[www.cdc.gov/NIP/publications/VIS](http://www.cdc.gov/NIP/publications/VIS)



FEEL FREE TO COPY THIS SHEET