

April 2017

Varicella

Information for the Public



What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a virus that causes an itchy blister-like rash, mild fever and other symptoms. Most children fully recover in about a week.

How is chickenpox transmitted?

The virus can be spread from one person to another through the air, by coming in contact with chicken pox blister, or by coming in contact with respiratory secretions. A child with chickenpox is contagious several days before the rash appears until the rash crusts over. It takes 10 to 21 days after exposure for someone to develop chickenpox.

Do I need to be concerned if my child has been exposed to chickenpox?

Your child is immune if he/she had chickenpox. Your child is protected against serious disease if he/she has received the vaccine. If your child has not had chicken pox or been vaccinated, then he or she should follow up with their primary care physician as soon as possible to receive vaccine. The vaccine is most effective when given within 72 hours of exposure.

Who needs the vaccine?

All children and adults without evidence of immunity to chickenpox need the vaccine. *You do NOT need the chickenpox vaccine if you meet any of the criteria for evidence of immunity.*

- Documentation of age-appropriate vaccination with a varicella vaccine
- Laboratory evidence of immunity or laboratory confirmation of prior disease
- Born in the United States before 1980, except health-care workers, pregnant women, and immunocompromised individuals. These individuals need to meet one of the other criterial.
- A healthcare provider diagnosis of chicken pox or history of chickenpox
- Diagnosis or Verification of a history of herpes zoster by a health-care provider

What is the vaccine recommendation?

Two doses of chickenpox vaccine are recommended. The first dose is recommended at 12-15 months of age. The second dose is recommended at 4-6 years, before entering kindergarten or first grade. It may be given sooner, as long as it is at least 3 months from when the first dose was given. Older children and adolescents over 13 years old and adults who have only received one dose of vaccine and have no evidence of past disease, should receive a second dose unless there is a medical contraindication. The second dose should be administered 4-8 weeks after the first dose or as soon as possible if more than 8 weeks have passed since 1st dose.

Division of Infectious Disease Epidemiology

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Who is the chickenpox vaccine especially important for?

- Healthcare professionals
- People who care for or are around immunocompromised people
- Teachers
- Child care workers
- Residents and staff in nursing homes and residential settings
- College students
- Inmates and staff of correctional institutions
- Military personnel
- Women of childbearing age who are not pregnant (women should not get pregnant for 1 month after being vaccinated)
- Adolescents and adults living with children
- International travelers

Who should not receive the chickenpox vaccine?

- History of anaphylactic/anaphylactoid reaction to gelatin, neomycin, or any other component of the vaccine
- Has blood dyscrasias, leukemia, lymphomas, or malignant neoplasms affecting bone marrow or lymphatic system
- Is receiving prolonged, high-dose systemic immunosuppressive therapy for 2 or more weeks, including large doses of oral steroids
- Has a moderate or severe concurrent illness
- Has received blood products (such as whole blood, plasma, or immune globulin) during the previous 3 to 11 months

What if my child hasn't had chickenpox?

- Most children and adults recover from chickenpox in about a week. Healthy children have mild cases of chickenpox while adults may have more severe disease and a higher incidence of complications.
- Chickenpox vaccine is effective in preventing or reducing severity of disease if given within 72 hours of exposure. The vaccine may be effective if given within 5 days of exposure.
- **Individuals with impaired immune systems and pregnant women who are not immune should see a physician immediately if exposed to chickenpox. A special medication can prevent infection if given within 96 hours of exposure.**

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