

National Varicella (Chickenpox) Vaccination Program

Commencing 1 November 2005

Information for the General Public

Commonly Asked Questions

Who is eligible for free varicella vaccine?

Varicella vaccine is being provided free for all children at 18 months of age and for children aged 10-13 years who have not received varicella vaccine or who have not had the disease.

When will free varicella vaccine be available for 18 month olds?

Free varicella vaccine will be available from 1 November 2005 for children *born on or after 1 May 2004*.

When will free varicella vaccine be available for 10-13 year olds ('catch-up program')?

The 'catch-up' program for children/adolescents in the 10-13 years age group will be administered by the State and Territory health departments. Details of the program are still being finalised and further information is expected to be available in the next few weeks. Parents of eligible children should contact their State or Territory Health Department (see contacts list below).

Will I need a prescription from my doctor first?

No, after 1 November 2005 you will not need to get a prescription first. As with all free vaccines available under the National Immunisation Program, your general practitioner or other immunisation provider will have the vaccine available in their surgery or clinic.

If I want my child to be vaccinated before 1 November 2005 can I get free vaccine?

No. If you choose to have your child vaccinated prior to 1 November 2005, you will need a prescription to purchase the vaccine from your pharmacy.

What is varicella and how serious is it?

Varicella (chickenpox) is a disease that mainly affects children, in whom it is usually a mild illness. It is often more severe when it occurs in adults. The illness begins suddenly with fever, headache, fatigue, feeling unwell and an itchy, generalised skin rash which changes from small red lumps to blisters to scabs over a few days. Most children recover quickly with no ongoing problems. However, varicella can cause serious complications, such as skin infections, pneumonia, and inflammation of the brain, and, in some cases, the illness is fatal.

A person who has had chicken pox develops immunity and does not contract it again. However, the virus remains within the body after the initial infection and sometimes causes a condition known as 'shingles' or "herpes zoster" later in life. This condition causes a localised rash, which can result in severe and long lasting pain, especially in older people.

How common is varicella in Australia ?

Varicella is a common childhood illness. As it is easily transmitted, most people who are not vaccinated against the virus will have the disease at some time in their lives. There are about 1500 hospitalisations due to varicella each year, mostly in young children. Approximately 8-10 varicella-related deaths are recorded each year. Over 40% of these deaths occur in people aged 65 years and over.

Will the new vaccine affect my eligibility for family benefit payments?

Assessment of your child's immunisation status on the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register for family benefit payments will not initially include varicella vaccine when the program starts on 1 November 2005.

How do I find out more information about eligibility or payments for Child Care Benefit (CCB) / Maternity Immunisation Allowance (MIA)?

For information on eligibility and payments of Child Care Benefit (CCB) and Maternity Immunisation Allowance (MIA) visit a Family Assistance Office located in Medicare Offices, Centrelink Customer Service Centres and ATOaccess sites. Alternatively, visit the Family Assistance Office website at <http://www.familyassist.gov.au> or phone 13 61 50 .

Can I claim for the chickenpox vaccine on my health insurance?

Some health insurers list vaccination as a claimable item – inquire with your own insurer.

- [Information for Immunisation Providers](#)
- [National Varicella \(Chickenpox\) Vaccination Program](#)