



National Varicella (Chickenpox) Vaccination Program

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

Who is eligible to receive free chickenpox vaccine?

Children born on or after 1 May 2004 are eligible to receive free chickenpox vaccine when they turn 18 months of age.

A one year age group of children between 10 and 13 years who have not received chickenpox vaccine, or who have not had the disease, will be eligible to receive free vaccine as part of a long-term catch-up program. The particular age group within the age range of 10 to 13 years provided with the free vaccine will vary between States and Territories. If you have a child in this age range, you should contact your immunisation provider for details about the catch-up program in your area.

What is chickenpox and how serious is it?

Chickenpox (also called varicella) 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, chickenpox can cause serious complications, such as skin infections, pneumonia and inflammation of the brain. In some cases, the illness is fatal.

Chickenpox infection in the first half of pregnancy can cause malformations, skin scarring, and other problems in the baby.

continued overleaf



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A person who has had chickenpox develops immunity and usually does not contract it again. However, the virus remains within the body after the initial infection and sometimes causes a condition known as 'shingles' (herpes zoster) later in life. This condition causes a localised rash, which can result in severe and long lasting pain. For children who have not had chickenpox, the vaccine can help protect them against shingles in later life as well as the actual chickenpox illness.

How common is chickenpox in Australia?

Chickenpox is a common childhood illness. As it is very contagious, most people who are not vaccinated against the virus will have the disease at some time in their lives. There are about 1500 hospitalisations and seven deaths each year from chickenpox in Australia.

Are there side effects from receiving the vaccine?

Side effects are usually mild. About 20% of children may experience pain, redness or swelling at the injection site or fever. A mild chickenpox-like rash may develop in 3 to 5% of children six to 20 days after vaccination. Serious side effects are very rare. The risks of chickenpox disease are much greater than the very small risks of immunisation.

What if my child has already had chickenpox?

If your child has already had chickenpox, they should be protected and not require vaccination. However, if you are unsure if your child has had chickenpox, you should speak to your doctor or immunisation provider for further advice. There is no increased risk of side effects from the vaccine if your child has already had the disease or has previously been vaccinated.

Can my child get chickenpox even after receiving the vaccine?

There is a small chance of catching chickenpox from another person even after receiving the vaccine. However, if this happens, it is usually a much milder illness than if your child had not been vaccinated.

Where can I get more information?

Additional information is available from your immunisation provider, the Immunise Australia Program Infoline on 1800 671 811 or the Immunise Australia Program website at www.immunise.health.gov.au.



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