# CHICKENPOX VACCINE

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

## 1 Why get vaccinated?

**Chickenpox (also called varicella) is a common childhood disease.** It is usually mild, but it can be serious, especially in young infants and adults.

- The chickenpox virus can be spread from person to person through the air, or by contact with fluid from chickenpox blisters.
- It causes a rash, itching, fever, and tiredness.
- It can lead to severe skin infection, scars, pneumonia, brain damage, or death.
- A person who has had chickenpox can get a painful rash called shingles years later.
- About 12,000 people are hospitalized for chickenpox each year in the United States.
- About 100 people die each year in the United States as a result of chickenpox.

**Chickenpox vaccine can prevent chickenpox.**

Most people who get chickenpox vaccine will not get chickenpox. But if someone who has been vaccinated *does* get chickenpox, it is usually very mild. They will have fewer spots, are less likely to have a fever, and will recover faster.

## 2 Who should get chickenpox vaccine and when?

✓ **Children should get 1 dose of chickenpox vaccine between 12 and 18 months of age,** or at any age after that if they have never had chickenpox.

People who do not get the vaccine until 13 years of age or older should get **2 doses,** 4-8 weeks apart.

Ask your doctor or nurse for details.

Chickenpox vaccine may be given at the same time as other vaccines.

## 3 Some people should not get chickenpox vaccine or should wait

- People should not get chickenpox vaccine if they have ever had a life-threatening allergic reaction to **gelatin**, the antibiotic **neomycin**, or (for those needing a second dose) **a previous dose of chickenpox vaccine.**
- People who are moderately or severely ill at the time the shot is scheduled should usually wait until they recover before getting chickenpox vaccine.
- Pregnant women should wait to get chickenpox vaccine until after they have given birth. Women should not get pregnant for 1 month after getting chickenpox vaccine.
- Some people should check with their doctor about whether they should get chickenpox vaccine, including anyone who:
  - Has HIV/AIDS or another disease that affects the immune system
  - Is being treated with drugs that affect the immune system, such as steroids, for 2 weeks or longer
  - Has any kind of cancer
  - Is taking cancer treatment with x-rays or drugs
- People who recently had a transfusion or were given other blood products should ask their doctor when they may get chickenpox vaccine.

Ask your doctor or nurse for more information.

## 4 What are the risks from chickenpox vaccine?

A vaccine, like any medicine, is capable of causing serious problems, such as severe allergic reactions. The risk of chickenpox vaccine causing serious harm, or death, is extremely small.

Getting chickenpox vaccine is much safer than getting chickenpox disease.

Most people who get chickenpox vaccine do not have any problems with it.

**Mild Problems**

- Soreness or swelling where the shot was given (about 1 out of 5 children and up to 1 out of 3 adolescents and adults)
- Fever (1 person out of 10, or less)
- Mild rash, up to a month after vaccination (1 person out of 20, or less). It is possible for these people to infect other members of their household, but this is *extremely* rare.

**Moderate Problems**

- Seizure (jerking or staring) caused by fever (less than 1 person out of 1,000).

**Severe Problems**

- Pneumonia (very rare)

Other serious problems, including severe brain reactions and low blood count, have been reported after chickenpox vaccination. These happen so rarely experts cannot tell whether they are caused by the vaccine or not. If they are, it is extremely rare.

## 5 What if there is a moderate or severe reaction?

**What should I look for?**

Any unusual condition, such as a serious allergic reaction, high fever or behavior changes. Signs of a serious allergic reaction can include difficulty breathing, hoarseness or wheezing, hives, paleness, weakness, a fast heart beat or dizziness within a few minutes to a few hours after the shot. A high fever or seizure, if it occurs, would happen 1 to 6 weeks after the shot.

**What should I do?**

- Call a doctor, or get the person to a doctor right away.
- Tell your doctor what happened, the date and time it happened, and when the vaccination was given.
- Ask your doctor, nurse, or health department to file a Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) form, or call VAERS yourself at **1-800-822-7967.**

## 6 The National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program

In the rare event that you or your child has a serious reaction to a vaccine, a federal program has been created to help you pay for the care of those who have been harmed.

For details about the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program, call **1-800-338-2382** or visit the program's website at **http://www.hrsa.gov/bhpr/vicp**

## 7 How can I learn more?

- Ask your doctor or nurse. They can give you the vaccine package insert or suggest other sources of information.
- Call your local or state health department's immunization program.
- Contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):
  - Call **1-800-232-2522** (English)
  - Call **1-800-232-0233** (Español)
  - Visit the National Immunization Program's website at **http://www.cdc.gov/nip**

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES**
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Immunization Program