

VARICELLA VACCINE

What is the varicella vaccine?

The varicella vaccine protects against varicella, commonly called chicken pox. The vaccine is approved by Health Canada and is provided free as part of the [Routine New Brunswick Immunization Schedule](#) for children.

What are the benefits of the vaccine?

The vaccine is the best way to protect against varicella or chicken pox. Varicella can cause serious illness and complications. When your child is immunized, they also help protect others.

How is the vaccine given?

The varicella vaccine is given as an injection into the thigh or upper arm.

Who should receive the vaccine?

In New Brunswick the vaccine is provided to children as a series of two doses. The first dose is given at 12 months of age and the second at 18 months. The vaccine is given at the same time as other routine childhood immunizations.

Other people who would benefit from receiving the vaccine include:

- Women of childbearing age.
- Household contacts of immunocompromised people.
- Health-care workers.
- Adults who may be exposed occupationally to varicella e.g teachers of young children, day-care workers.
- Immigrants and refugees from tropical climates who are more likely to be susceptible to varicella.
- Children and adolescents undergoing chronic salicylic acid treatment.
- People with cystic fibrosis.

Who should not receive the vaccine?

The vaccine should not be given to anyone who:

- had a severe allergic reaction to the vaccine in the past;
- is allergic to any of the ingredients of the vaccine or its container, including neomycin; or
- is pregnant or planning to become pregnant less than one month of receiving the vaccine.

*It is safe for household contacts of pregnant women to receive the varicella vaccine.

Speak with your health-care provider if you or your child has a weakened immune system or had a blood transfusion or received other blood products within the last three to 11 months as vaccination may need to be delayed.

What are the possible reactions after receiving the vaccine?

The most common reactions include soreness, redness and/or swelling where the vaccine was given and a mild fever. A rash may occur around the area where the vaccine was given within five to 26 days after immunization. The varicella (chicken pox) like blisters are not usually infectious and will disappear.

With any vaccine there is an extremely rare possibility (less than one in a million people) of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. For this reason, it is important to remain in the clinic for 15 minutes after receiving the varicella vaccine. Signs of this reaction may include rash, difficulty breathing or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. This reaction can be treated.

What can be done for reactions to the vaccine?

- A cold compress at the injection site may reduce discomfort.
- For discomfort and fever, you may give your child acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or Ibuprofen (Advil®) according to the manufacturer's directions.
- Aspirin (ASA) should **NOT** be given to children younger than 18 years due to its link to Reye's syndrome.

Any unexpected or serious reaction to a vaccine should be reported to your health-care provider.

What else you need to know.

Inform your immunization provider if your child has any health problems or allergies.

Your immunization provider will give you a record of your child's immunization. Keep this record in a safe place and bring it with you when your child is next due for immunization.

If your child has any unusual reactions to the vaccine, or you have any questions or concerns, please contact your health-care provider.

Further Information

In New Brunswick, the publicly funded varicella vaccine is provided to children at age 12 and 18 months through your local Public Health office or health-care provider.

For additional information, contact your health-care provider, [local Public Health office](#) or Tele-Care 811.

Useful websites:

- Government of New-Brunswick <http://www.gnb.ca/health>
- Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness and Promotion <http://www.immunize.cpha.ca>
- Public Health Agency of Canada <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca>

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