

# Immunise against chickenpox

Protect your child



**immunise**

their best protection

**This leaflet about chickenpox is for parents of babies and young children. It explains how immunisation can protect your family from chickenpox.**

## What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a common virus that causes an itchy skin rash and blisters.

Chickenpox is also called varicella. It's very infectious and spreads easily. Most children will catch it between the ages of 2 and 10 years. If one child in your household gets chickenpox, it's very likely that others will too.

Chickenpox can also cause:

- fever
- headache
- skin infections and scarring.



## How serious is it?

Chickenpox is uncomfortable, but usually mild and children will recover quickly. Most children will need around a week off school or early childhood education to recover and to avoid spreading disease.



Your pharmacist, doctor or nurse can give advice about treating the itchy rash.

Chickenpox can lead to skin infections, and rarely, more serious complications like eye damage, inflammation (swelling) of the brain, pneumonia, kidney problems and sometimes death.

Chickenpox during pregnancy can harm the baby and cause stillbirth.

The virus that causes chickenpox stays in your body even after you recover and can cause shingles many decades later.

Every year in New Zealand about 60,000 people catch chickenpox. Several hundred people need hospital treatment, and one or two people either die or suffer from long-term disability as a result of chickenpox.

### Each year in NZ



**60,000**

People catch chickenpox



**200+**

People need hospital treatment for chickenpox

## Who is most at risk?

Chickenpox is usually less severe in healthy children than in teenagers and adults. Most healthy children only need time off school or early childhood education, relief from itching and to continue drinking fluids. However some will develop serious complications.

Teenagers and adults are more likely to develop complications than children. Chickenpox is also dangerous for people whose immune systems are weak, and people with liver or kidney problems.

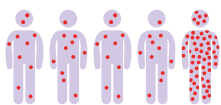
Pregnant women and their unborn babies are also at risk.

## How effective is the vaccine?

**One dose** of the vaccine will protect around four out of five people from any kind of chickenpox and almost everyone from severe chickenpox.

Some people who have been vaccinated will still get chickenpox, but they will have a milder illness.

### Without immunisation



Almost everyone catches chickenpox, and some get severe chickenpox

### With immunisation



With one dose of the vaccine most people are immune, but a few can still catch mild chickenpox

# Immunisation protects your family against chickenpox

One dose of the vaccine is free for the following people from 1 July 2017:

- children turning 15 months of age (ie, children born from 1 April 2016)
- children turning 11 years of age from 1 July 2017 who have never been infected with or previously immunised against chickenpox.



Chickenpox immunisation is recommended (but not free) for teenagers and adults who have never been infected with or immunised against chickenpox.

Reactions following immunisation include fever and tenderness, similar to other childhood vaccines. Some people may experience a mild rash similar to chickenpox between 5 and 26 days after immunisation.

In rare cases, this can be contagious – keep any blisters covered and stay away from anyone at risk of severe disease, such as people with weakened immune systems, babies or pregnant women.

Chickenpox immunisation is not recommended during pregnancy as it is a live virus vaccine.

## 4 Key Points

1. Chickenpox is very common.
2. The main symptom is an itchy, blistering skin rash.
3. In rare cases, chickenpox can cause serious illness.
4. One dose of varicella vaccine is free at age 15 months and protects against severe chickenpox.

## Where can I get more information?

### If you want to know more about chickenpox and immunisation:

- talk to your doctor, practice nurse, or general practice or contact your local public health service
- call 0800 IMMUNE (466 863)
- visit: [www.health.govt.nz/immunisation](http://www.health.govt.nz/immunisation)

This resource is available from [www.health.govt.nz](http://www.health.govt.nz) or the Authorised Provider at your local District Health Board. Published April 2017. 03/2019. Code **HE2519**



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