

# Chickenpox and the Vaccine (Shot) to Prevent It

Last updated April 2017

**The best way to protect against chickenpox (also called varicella) is by getting the chickenpox shot. Doctors recommend all children who have never had chickenpox get the shot.**

## Why should my child get the chickenpox shot?

The chickenpox shot:

- Protects your child from chickenpox, a potentially serious and even deadly disease.
- Keeps your child from missing up to one week of school or child care (and keeps you from missing work to care for your sick child).

## Is the chickenpox shot safe?

Yes. The chickenpox shots are very safe and effective at preventing chickenpox. Vaccines, like any medicine, can have side effects, but most children who get the chickenpox shot have no side effects.

## What are the side effects?

Most children don't have any side effects from the shot. However, some children may experience the following side effects:

- Soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given
- Fever
- Mild rash
- Temporary pain and stiffness in the joints

## What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a disease that causes an itchy rash of blisters and a fever. A person with chickenpox may have as many as 500 blisters. The rash can spread over the whole body. Chickenpox can be serious, even life-threatening, especially in babies, adolescents, adults, pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems.

## What are the symptoms of chickenpox?

Chickenpox usually causes the following symptoms:

- An itchy rash of blisters
- Fever
- Headache
- Feeling tired

Symptoms usually last 7 to 10 days. In some cases, chickenpox can cause serious problems.



Doctors recommend your child get two doses of the chickenpox shot for best protection. Your child will need one dose at each of the following ages:

- 12 through 15 months
- 4 through 6 years

## Is it serious?

Chickenpox is usually mild in children, but the itching can be very uncomfortable. Children who get chickenpox can miss about a week of school or child care.

Before the vaccine was available, about 4 million people got chickenpox each year in the United States, over 10,500 of those people were hospitalized, and about 100-150 people died.

In some cases, chickenpox can cause serious problems, such as:

- Skin infections
- Dehydration (loss of body fluids)
- Pneumonia (an infection in the lungs)
- Encephalitis (swelling of the brain)

## How does chickenpox spread?

Chickenpox spreads easily, mainly when a person touches or breathes in the virus particles that come from chickenpox blisters. It can also spread through tiny droplets that get into the air when someone who has chickenpox breathes or talks, for example. Chickenpox can spread 1 to 2 days before the infected person gets a rash until all the blisters have formed scabs.

## Why not let my child get chickenpox naturally and build natural immunity?

Chickenpox is a mild disease for many children, but not all. There's no way to know who will have a serious case. When your child gets the chickenpox shots, he or she is getting immunity from chickenpox without the risk of serious complications of the disease.

## Where can I learn more about the chickenpox shot and my child?

To learn more about the chickenpox shot, talk to your child's doctor, call 1-800-CDC-INFO, or visit [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents).