

Varicella (chickenpox) vaccine

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

Before the vaccine, about 11,000 people were hospitalized for chickenpox each year in the United States. About 100 people died each year as a result of chickenpox.

Chickenpox vaccine can prevent chickenpox. Most people (80%) who get chickenpox vaccine will not get the disease. But if someone who has been vaccinated does get chickenpox, it is usually very mild. They will have fewer blisters, are less likely to have a fever, and will recover faster. The vaccine also reduces the risk of shingles later in life.

This vaccine is less likely to be effective if given before the first birthday. It is typically given at 12 to 15 months of age, and a second dose is given by age 6 years.