Varicella (Var)

What is the Var Vaccine?

The Var vaccine is a safe and effective way to keep you and your child from getting very sick from the real disease. It is approved by Health Canada. The Var vaccine (shot) is made with a tiny amount of weakened germs that cannot cause disease. Vaccines help the immune system learn how to protect itself against the real disease.

Is varicella serious?

Varicella, also called chickenpox, is a virus that can cause an itchy rash that looks like small water blisters.

Varicella can be serious and even life threatening, especially for newborn babies and adults who have weakened immune systems.

Complications from varicella infection include:

Pneumonia (lung infection),

Encephalitis (swelling of the brain),

Bacterial infections of the skin.

Once you have the varicella virus it will stay with you forever. In some people, the virus can become active again and cause a painful blistered rash known as "shingles".

The best way to protect against varicella is to get the Var vaccine. Everyone over the age of 12 months should get this vaccine. Children 12 months to 12 years may receive MMRV vaccine instead.

How is varicella spread?

Varicella is a virus that spreads easily from person to person. It can spread though:

- The air when you are in the same room as someone infected with varicella,
- Contact with liquid from a varicella/shingles blister,
- Contact with saliva from a person infected with varicella.

A pregnant woman with varicella can pass it on to her baby before birth or to her newborn baby.

Why should you get the Var vaccine?

Immunization is the best way to protect against varicella.

When you are immunized you also help protect others, as someone who is immunized is less likely to spread infection.

When pregnant women and those around her are immunized they protect the newborn baby from getting varicella.

What are possible reactions to the Var vaccine?

Vaccines, like any medicine, can have side effects. Most people who get the Var vaccine do not have any reactions.

Possible signs of reactions to the vaccine include:

- Soreness,
- Redness, and
- Swelling where the vaccine was given.

Other signs include:

- Fever, and
- Rash/blisters that looks like chickenpox.

Spread of the chickenpox through these blisters is possible, but very rare.

Who should NOT get the Var vaccine?

Speak to your health care provider.

Who should get the Var vaccine?

Var is given as a series of 2 shots according to the following schedule for those unimmunized and susceptible to varicella disease.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol® and Tempra®) can be given for fever or soreness.

ASA (Aspirin®) should **NEVER** be given to children because it can cause a severe liver and brain disease called Reye's Syndrome.

SCHEDULE FOR CHILDREN (17 or under)						
Vaccine	Age					
	Birth	1-11 mos.	12 mos.	2 years	3 years	4-17 years
Var or as MMRV*			✓		✓	

* **MMRV can only be given to those 12 months to 12 years of age.**

Children and adults not immunized or who are susceptible to varicella can receive the varicella vaccine as a two dose series 6 weeks apart.

To find out more about the Var vaccine contact your local health centre to speak to your public health nurse or visit the following links:

- NWT Immunization Schedule: http://www.hss.gov.nt.ca
- Immunize Canada: https://immunize.ca
- To keep track of your family's immunizations on your smart phone or tablet and to receive vaccine schedule reminders please download the CANImmunize App at: https://www.canimmunize.ca

Your local health care centre is located at the address below.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is a rare possibility of a severe allergic reaction. This can include: hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips.

If this happens after you leave the clinic, call or go to the nearest Emergency Department or your local health centre for immediate treatment.

Report any serious or unexpected side-effects to your public health nurse.

Place Health Centre contact information here.

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