

Who is immune to Varicella?

All children and adults without evidence of immunity to varicella should get the vaccine. Evidence of immunity includes any of the following:

- Laboratory confirmation of the disease
- Documentation of age appropriate vaccination
- Born in the United States before 1980*
- A healthcare provider diagnosis or verification of varicella disease
- History of herpes zoster based on healthcare provider diagnosis

*Note: Year of birth is not considered evidence of immunity for healthcare personnel, immunosuppressed people, and pregnant women.

How is it diagnosed?

Diagnosis is made by observing the symptoms and the typical appearance of the rash.

Parental report of chickenpox is sufficient for case reporting. In Arizona, laboratory testing may be beneficial, but is NOT required to be done prior to reporting a case to the local health department.

How do I report this to the health department?

Cases of varicella and varicella outbreaks must be reported to your county health department. School nurses can report varicella using the Arizona School-based Varicella Reporting Form and through the Child Health Indicators Program (CHIP).

Schools and county health departments should collect samples to test for chickenpox during outbreaks. Please notify your county health department if there is an outbreak to coordinate collection of crusts from lesions.

If you have questions, contact:



Office of Infectious Disease Services

150 N. 18th Avenue, Suite 140

Phoenix, AZ 85007-3237

Phone: (602) 364-3676 Fax: (602) 364-3199

www.azdhs.gov

Resources:

www.cdc.gov

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/pinkbook/index.html>

Varicella (Chickenpox)



Information for Healthcare Professionals

Arizona Department of Health Services

What is Varicella?

Varicella, also known as chickenpox, is an infectious disease caused by the varicella-zoster virus. The same virus also causes herpes zoster (shingles) in adults.

What are the symptoms?

Some people have the following symptoms before a rash appears:

- Fever
- Headache
- Tiredness
- Loss of appetite

A rash occurs about 10-21 days after coming into contact with someone who had the disease. The average unimmunized child develops 250-500 itchy blisters over red spots on the skin. The blisters are usually first seen on the face, middle of the body, or scalp. Usually after a day or two, the blisters become cloudy and then form scabs.

Children who are fully vaccinated may still get varicella, but the illness is typically mild, producing no symptoms at all other than a few red bumps.

Who gets it?

Anyone can get varicella, but some individuals are at an increased risk for complications. Chickenpox typically lasts 5-10 days in unvaccinated children.

These groups are at risk of complications:

- Persons older than 15 years
- Immunocompromised persons
- Infants younger than 1 year of age
- Newborns whose mothers have rash onset from 1-5 days before or 1-2 days after delivery
- Pregnant women who have not had chickenpox



How is it transmitted?

The virus is transferred from one person to another through direct contact with the broken chickenpox blisters and through airborne droplets caused by sneezing or coughing. The infectious period begins about 2 days before the rash appears and lasts until all the blisters have formed scabs.

How is it prevented?

Vaccination is the best way to prevent varicella infection. As of 2006, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends two doses of the vaccine, first at one year of age and another around 4-6 years old. Children who receive two doses of the vaccine are less likely to get chickenpox than those who receive one dose. As of 2010, all students in grades K-12 in Arizona are required to have at least one dose of the vaccine or history of the disease prior to school entry.