

# VARICELLA VACCINE OFFERS PROTECTION AGAINST SERIOUS ILLNESSES

Beginning on 1 September 2017, the varicella vaccine will be offered for all children aged 1.5–11 years who have never had varicella, also known as chickenpox. The vaccine is part of the the national vaccination programme and is available free of charge. Vaccinations are administered at the health examinations for age groups provided at child health clinics and schools. The vaccine series consists of two doses.

## Varicella and herpes zoster

Varicella, or chickenpox, is the inflammation of the entire body (general infection). Its most typical symptoms are rash with blisters and fever which last 5–7 days. For adults, varicella is often a severe disease.

Varicella is highly contagious. A person with varicella can spread the disease already for two days before the appearance of any symptoms, and contagiousness persists 4–5 days after the onset of the rash. After the illness, the varicellovirus will remain in the body. In around one third of people, the virus will later trigger herpes zoster, also known as shingles, a painful disease characterised by blisters.

## Secondary diseases of varicella are rare but serious

For children, secondary bacterial infection of skin is the most common secondary disease of chickenpox. Other possible secondary diseases include pneumonia and encephalitis, diseases that may cause permanent damage.

Adults are at more risk for secondary diseases. Varicella can have particularly severe consequences for pregnant women or unborn children. In pregnant women, the infection may lead to life-threatening pneumonia as well as severe malformations and mental disability (so-called congenital varicella syndrome) of the unborn baby.



## The vaccine protects against both varicella and secondary diseases

Two doses of the varicella vaccine provide excellent protection. In countries with high varicella vaccination coverage, children do not die from chickenpox and do not have to be hospitalised due to the disease. The incidence of mild varicella is also rare in these countries.

The varicella vaccine has been used for over 20 years and over 200 million doses have been administered worldwide. The effects of the vaccine have been carefully monitored and the vaccine has not been found to have any significant disadvantages. Around one in five of vaccinated people experience local symptoms, such as pain, redness or swelling at the injection site. Around one in eight develop fever. Fewer than one in twenty get a few chickenpox blisters from the vaccine.

While the vaccine has been used in Finland for a long time, introducing it into the national vaccination programme makes the vaccine available free of charge.

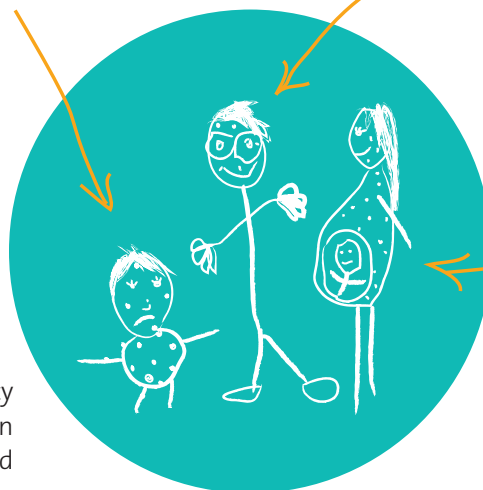


## Chickenpox

A child has between 250 and 500 blisters. When the child scratches the skin, bacteria causing impetigo can enter into the blisters.

Nausea sometimes occurs as a secondary disease of chickenpox. The person's walking might be shaky and speech might be slurred for a while.

Temporary haemorrhagic tendency is a secondary disease of varicella. In this case, there are not enough blood platelets for blood coagulation.



For adults, pneumonia is the most common secondary disease. It might be life-threatening for pregnant women.

Congenital varicella is contracted in the uterus. It often causes serious damages to the unborn child.

Chickenpox soon after birth can lead to neonatal varicella, an illness always requiring hospitalisation.

## The vaccine prevents serious chickenpox

For more information on varicella, risks related to the disease and the vaccination, consult your child health clinic, school health nurse or online at

[www.thl.fi/vesirokkorokote](http://www.thl.fi/vesirokkorokote)



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