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 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.
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