

Chickenpox (Varicella) vaccine

Vaccination against chickenpox is already included in the routine childhood immunisations in some countries, but not yet in the UK. While the vaccine is available in the UK, GPs are advised by the Department not to give it routinely to children.

More and more parents are enquiring about vaccination against chickenpox; if it is available elsewhere, why don't we have it here? Some mothers wish their children to be protected from what can be quite a nasty disease; others wish to protect themselves for when they are pregnant; and others need it because they have friends or relatives with compromised immune systems (eg from chemotherapy), and passing on chickenpox to them could have serious consequences.

The varicella vaccine is available: it is a live vaccine. It can be given to children aged 1 or over and to adults. 2 doses are required for all, 6 weeks apart.

Reactions are unusual; commonly, redness & swelling at the injection site. Occasionally a chickenpox-type rash might occur. This *may* cause chickenpox infection in others if they have weakened immunity; so if there are any family members or friends who have immune deficiency (eg undergoing chemotherapy, immune disorders) they must not be in contact. As a precaution, this should include women who are more than 28 weeks pregnant, even if they have had chickenpox in the past (though the risk to the mother and baby is probably extremely low). It should not be a risk to anyone else, even if they themselves have not had chickenpox.

The vaccine should NOT be given to:

Children under 1 year

People who have had previous severe allergic reaction to the vaccine

People who have weakened immune systems (HIV, chemotherapy etc) or chronic severe infections (TB)

People who are pregnant

People who are ill with a high temperature

The cost of each vaccine is £100 pounds.