PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Varicella Virus Vaccine

This information from UpToDate® Lexidrug™ explains what you need to know about this medication, including what it's used for, how to take it, its side effects, and when to call your healthcare provider.

Brand Names: US

Varivax

Brand Names: Canada

Varilrix; Varivax III

What is this drug used for?

- It is used to prevent chickenpox infection.

What do I need to tell the doctor BEFORE my child takes this drug?

- If your child is allergic to this drug; any part of this drug; or any other drugs, foods, or substances. Tell the doctor about the allergy and what signs your child had.
- If your child has any of these health problems: A weak immune system or a family member with a weak immune system, TB (tuberculosis) that is not being treated, or an illness with a fever.
- If your child is taking any drugs to suppress the immune system. This may be certain doses of steroids like prednisone. This does not apply to children taking steroids for certain health problems like Addison's disease. There are many drugs that can suppress the immune system. Ask your child's doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure.

- If your child has recently had any of these: Blood transfusion, plasma transfusion, immune globulin like varicella-zoster immune globulin.
- If your child has had a measles vaccine in the past month.
- If your child is pregnant or plans to get pregnant within the next 3 months. Do not give this drug to your child during pregnancy or if your child is planning to get pregnant within the next 3 months.

This is not a list of all drugs or health problems that interact with this drug.

Tell the doctor and pharmacist about all of your child's drugs (prescription or OTC, natural products, vitamins) and health problems. You must check to make sure that it is safe to give this drug with all of your child's other drugs and health problems. Do not start, stop, or change the dose of any drug your child takes without checking with the doctor.

What are some things I need to know or do while my child takes this drug?

- Tell all of your child's health care providers that your child is taking this drug. This includes your child's doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.
- Vaccines may not fully protect all people who get them. If you have questions, talk with the doctor.
- If your child will be having a tuberculosis (TB) skin test, the test can be done before, on the same day, or at least 4 weeks after getting this vaccine. This vaccine may affect TB tests. Talk with the doctor if you have questions about when your child can have a TB test.
- Rarely, your child can spread the chickenpox virus to others after getting this vaccine. When able to, have your child avoid close contact with certain people. People like newborns, pregnant people who have not had chickenpox, and people with weak immune systems. Do this for up to 6 weeks after your child gets this vaccine. Talk with the doctor if your child cannot avoid close contact with these people.
- Do not give aspirin or products like aspirin for at least 6 weeks after your child gets this vaccine. The chance of a very bad illness called Reye's

syndrome may be raised. Reye's syndrome causes damage to the brain and liver.

If your child is pregnant or breast-feeding a baby:

- This drug may cause harm to the unborn baby if your child takes it during pregnancy.
- If your child gets pregnant within 3 months after getting this vaccine, call the doctor right away.
- Tell the doctor if your child is breast-feeding a baby. You will need to talk about any risks to the baby.

What are some side effects that I need to call my child's doctor about right away?

- **WARNING/CAUTION:** Even though it may be rare, some people may have very bad and sometimes deadly side effects when taking a drug. Tell your child's doctor or get medical help right away if your child has any of the following signs or symptoms that may be related to a very bad side effect:
- Signs of an allergic reaction, like rash; hives; itching; red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin with or without fever; wheezing; tightness in the chest or throat; trouble breathing, swallowing, or talking; unusual hoarseness; or swelling of the mouth, face, lips, tongue, or throat.
- Rash that looks like chickenpox on the body or where the shot was given.
- Shingles.
- Rarely, other side effects have happened with this drug. It is not known if this drug caused these side effects. Call your child's doctor right away if your child has easy bruising; red or purple, flat spots under the skin; pale skin; trouble walking; severe skin problems, or a skin infection. Call your child's doctor right away if your child has a headache, fever, chills, very upset stomach or throwing up, stiff neck, seizures, feels sleepy or confused, or if bright lights bother your child's eyes.

What are some other side effects of this drug?

All drugs may cause side effects. However, many people have no side effects or only have minor side effects. Call your child's doctor or get medical help if any of these side effects or any other side effects bother your child or do not go away:

- Mild fever.
- Feeling fussy.
- Pain, redness, swelling, or other reaction where the injection was given.

These are not all of the side effects that may occur. If you have questions about side effects, call your child's doctor. Call your child's doctor for medical advice about side effects.

You may report side effects to your national health agency.

How is this drug best given?

Give this drug as ordered by your child's doctor. Read all information given to you. Follow all instructions closely.

- This medicine is given as a shot into a muscle or the fatty part of the skin.

What do I do if my child misses a dose?

- Call your child's doctor to find out what to do.

How do I store and/or throw out this drug?

- If you need to store this drug at home, talk with your child's doctor, nurse, or pharmacist about how to store it.

General drug facts

- If your child's symptoms or health problems do not get better or if they become worse, call your child's doctor.
- Do not share your child's drug with others and do not give anyone else's

drug to your child.

- Keep all drugs in a safe place. Keep all drugs out of the reach of children and pets.
- Throw away unused or expired drugs. Do not flush down a toilet or pour down a drain unless you are told to do so. Check with your pharmacist if you have questions about the best way to throw out drugs. There may be drug take-back programs in your area.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your child's doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- If you think there has been an overdose, call your poison control center or get medical care right away. Be ready to tell or show what was taken, how much, and when it happened.

Additional Information

Vaccine Information Statements (VIS) are made by the staff of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Each VIS gives information to properly inform the adult receiving the vaccine or, in the case of a minor, the child's parent or legal representative about the risks and benefits of each vaccine. Before a doctor vaccinates a child or an adult, the provider is required by the National Childhood Vaccine Injury Act to give a copy of the VIS. You can also get foreign language versions.

https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/current-vis/varicella.html

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If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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