Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

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 my doctor BEFORE I take this drug?

- If you are allergic to this drug; any part of this drug; or any other drugs, foods, or substances. Tell your doctor about the allergy and what signs you had.
- If you have 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 you are taking any drugs to suppress your immune system. This may be certain doses of steroids like prednisone. There are many drugs that can suppress your immune system. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure.
- If you have had a measles vaccine in the past month.
- If you have recently had any of these: Blood transfusion, plasma transfusion,

immune globulin drugs like varicella-zoster immune globulin.

- If you are pregnant or plan to get pregnant within the next 3 months. Do not take this drug if you are pregnant or if you are 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 your doctor and pharmacist about all of your drugs (prescription or OTC, natural products, vitamins) and health problems. You must check to make sure that it is safe for you to take this drug with all of your drugs and health problems. Do not start, stop, or change the dose of any drug without checking with your doctor.

What are some things I need to know or do while I take this drug?

- Tell all of your health care providers that you take this drug. This includes your doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.
- Vaccines may not fully protect all people who get them. If you have questions, talk with the doctor.
- If you will be having a tuberculosis (TB) skin test, you can be tested before, on the same day, or at least 4 weeks after you get this vaccine. This vaccine may affect TB tests. Talk with your doctor if you have questions about when you can have a TB test.
- Rarely, you can spread the chickenpox virus to others after you get this vaccine. When you are able to, avoid close contact with certain people like newborns, pregnant people who have not had chickenpox, and people with weak immune systems. Do this for up to 6 weeks after getting this vaccine. Talk with your doctor if you cannot avoid close contact with these people.
- Do not take aspirin or products like aspirin for at least 6 weeks after getting 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.
- This drug may cause harm to the unborn baby if you take it while you are pregnant.

- If you get pregnant within 3 months after getting this drug, call your doctor right away.
- Tell your doctor if you are breast-feeding. You will need to talk about any risks to your baby.

What are some side effects that I need to call my 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 doctor or get medical help right away if you have 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 doctor right away if you have easy bruising; red or purple, flat spots under the skin; pale skin; trouble walking; severe skin problems, or a skin infection. Call your doctor right away if you have a headache, fever, chills, very upset stomach or throwing up, stiff neck, seizures, you feel sleepy or confused, or if bright lights bother your 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 doctor or get medical help if any of these side effects or any other side effects bother you 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 doctor. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects.

You may report side effects to your national health agency.

Report side effects to the FDA/CDC Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) at https://vaers.hhs.gov/reportevent.html or by calling 1-800-822-7967.

How is this drug best taken?

Use this drug as ordered by your 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 I miss a dose?

- Call your 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 doctor, nurse, or pharmacist about how to store it.

General drug facts

- If your symptoms or health problems do not get better or if they become worse, call your doctor.
- Do not share your drugs with others and do not take anyone else's drugs.
- 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 doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. Check with your pharmacist. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your 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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Last Reviewed Date

2026-08-26

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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.

Varicella Virus Vaccine - Last updated on December 12, 2022
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