

Varicella Zoster Immune Globulin (VZIG)

Get protected, get immunized.

- Vaccines make your immune system stronger. They build antibodies to help prevent diseases.
- Immunization is safe. It is much safer to get immunized than to get these diseases.

What is varicella zoster immune globulin (VZIG)?

VZIG is made from blood and contains antibodies to the varicella zoster virus. This virus causes chickenpox and shingles. VZIG provides fast protection, but the protection is not long lasting.

What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox (also called varicella) is a virus that causes fever and an itchy rash that looks like small water-filled blisters. It spreads easily through the air by coughing, sneezing, or touching open blisters.

It is usually mild, but it can be more serious in newborns, adolescents, adults, and people with weak immune systems. Complications can include:

- skin infections
- pneumonia (a type of lung infection)
- blood infections
- other deadly infections

If you are pregnant get chickenpox, there is a small risk of having a miscarriage or having a baby born with birth defects.

If you get chickenpox a few days before or after you have your baby, the baby has a high risk of getting very sick or dying.

What is shingles?

The chickenpox virus stays in your body, even after your symptoms are gone. The virus can become active again and cause shingles (also called herpes zoster). It usually appears as a painful, blistering rash on one side of your body. The rash can last for several weeks.

- Anyone who had chickenpox can get shingles. But it is most common in adults over age 50 years and people with weak immune systems. About 1 in 3 Canadians will develop shingles.
- The nerve pain from shingles (called post-herpetic neuralgia) can be severe and last for months. The pain can prevent you from doing daily activities such as walking, sleeping, or visiting with friends and family.
- Shingles is less common and less serious in people who have had chickenpox vaccine.
- A person who is not protected against chickenpox can get it by touching a shingles rash.

Who should get VZIG?

You may get VZIG if you have contact with the varicella zoster virus, you are not protected against the virus, and you are at risk of getting very sick. Those at risk of getting very sick may include:

- people with a weak immune system
- people who are pregnant
- premature babies if the person who gave birth is not protected
- newborn babies if the person who gave birth gets chickenpox within a few days of birth.

How many doses do I need?

You need 1 dose of VZIG as soon as possible after contact with the virus.

How well does VZIG work?

VZIG helps prevent chickenpox. If you do get chickenpox, VZIG helps prevent you from getting very sick.

Is VZIG safe?

VZIG is one of the safest blood products available. Canadian Blood Services carefully screens donors and tests all blood. Blood of donors is not used if the donor has risk factors or tests positive for an infectious disease. VZIG is treated with heat and chemicals to kill germs. The risk of getting an infection from VZIG is very small.

Where can I get VZIG?

Call Health Link at 811 if you have had contact with chickenpox or shingles and you:

- are pregnant and have never had chickenpox or shingles or had a chickenpox vaccine
- have a weak immune system

If you need VZIG, you will get it at your local public health office or hospital.

Are there side effects from VZIG?

There can be side effects from VZIG, but they tend to be mild and go away in a few days. Side effects may include:

- bruising, itching, or feeling sore where you had the needle
- feeling tired
- headache
- chills
- body aches
- feeling sick to your stomach (nausea)
- rash
- flushing

It is important to stay at the hospital or public health office for 15 minutes after you have VZIG. Some people may have a rare but serious allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. If anaphylaxis happens, you will get medicine to treat the symptoms.

It is rare to have a serious side effect. Call Health Link at 811 to report any serious or unusual side effects.

How can I manage side effects?

- To help with soreness and swelling, put a cool, wet cloth over the area where you had the needle.
- There is medicine to help with fever or pain. Check with your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure what medicine or dose to take. Follow the directions on the package.
- Some people with health problems, such as a weak immune system, must call their doctor if they get a fever. If you have been told to do this, call your doctor even if you think the fever is from VZIG.

Who should not get VZIG?

Talk to your healthcare provider before getting VZIG if you:

- have an allergy to any part of the immune globulin
- had a severe (serious) or unusual side effect after this immune globulin or one like it
- have low or no immunoglobulin A in your blood (IgA deficiency)

Check with your doctor or public health nurse before you get VZIG.

You can still have VZIG if you have a mild illness such as a cold or fever.

What vaccines protect against chickenpox and shingles?

For long-term protection, you need to be immunized with a vaccine that protects against chickenpox (varicella) or shingles (herpes zoster).

Vaccines that protect against chickenpox:

- **MMR-Var** protects against measles, mumps, rubella and chickenpox. Children can get this vaccine at age 12 and 18 months.
- **VZ** protects against chickenpox. You can get this vaccine if you have never had chickenpox. Children can also get this vaccine at age 12 and 18 months if they do not get the MMR-Var vaccine.

Vaccines that protect against shingles:

- **Shingrix** protects against shingles. You can get it for free if you are age 18 years or older and have had or will have an organ transplant. If you are not having an organ transplant, you can get this vaccine if you are age 50 years or older, but you need to pay for it.

Can VZIG affect any vaccines I have had?

VZIG can interfere with live vaccines, including vaccines to prevent chickenpox. Before getting a live vaccine, tell your healthcare provider if you had VZIG in the past 5 months. If you had a live vaccine less than 14 days before having VZIG, ask a public health nurse if you need the live vaccine again.

I have a fear of needles. How can I prepare for my immunization?

Many adults and children are afraid of needles. You can do many things before, during, and after immunization to be more comfortable.



Scan the QR code, visit ahs.ca/vaccinecomfort, or call Health Link at 811 for information.

For more information about immunization



Call Health Link at **811**



Scan the QR code or go to ahs.ca/immunize