



ParentPages

SHOTSMARTS FROM IMMUNIZE GEORGIA

Protect Your Family from Chickenpox – Second Shot of Varicella Vaccine Recommended

Chickenpox (varicella) is a rash illness caused by the varicella zoster virus. Before the varicella vaccine was developed, chickenpox was a common childhood infection.

The virus causes a rash-illness and fever. It can spread quickly to people who have never had the disease or the vaccine. Chickenpox is usually a mild illness, but can be serious in infants and adults.

Since the varicella vaccine was licensed in 1995, the number of cases has gone down by 80 to 85 percent. Until this year, one shot of varicella vaccine was recommended for infants 12 to 18 months of age. However, experience has shown that one shot does not provide complete protection for all children.

Chickenpox in a vaccinated person is known as “breakthrough disease”—a mild case of varicella with fewer lesions (less than 50) and a low grade or no fever which lasts for a shorter period of time, often only a few days. Breakthrough disease is sometimes not recognized as varicella and can be confused with other rash illnesses or skin conditions. While children with breakthrough disease may have milder symptoms, these children can pass the virus to parents and others who may be at a high risk for severe disease.

Varicella outbreaks have continued to occur, especially in the school setting. These outbreaks usually involve children with breakthrough disease. In one Georgia school this fall, a second-grade student developed a rash illness, which the parents at first thought was poison oak. After two days, the parents took the child to the doctor and discovered he actually had varicella. Eight days later, another student in the same classroom developed a suspicious rash that also turned out to be varicella.

Over the next five weeks, 14 cases of varicella were identified, six from the original classroom and eight from other grades. All of these students had received their varicella shot at one year of age. While the cases were mild, there was a concern the students could spread the varicella to medically fragile students who could not be vaccinated. Because of this risk, children with medical or religious exemptions were required to stay at home until two weeks after the last case was identified.

Handling a school outbreak can be overwhelming for the school system and school nurse, requiring a great amount of time to respond to many issues. In this school, the nurse had to review 800 student shot records in half a day to identify any and all students who might be at risk for catching varicella. Other states have also had varicella outbreaks. From October 2005 to January 2006, an outbreak at a Maine elementary school continued for three months and involved 350 students.¹ For this school, 98 percent of the students had received one shot of the varicella vaccine. Giving the students a second shot of varicella finally ended the outbreak.

In June 2006, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommended that children now receive a second shot of varicella vaccine. Under the new recommendations, the first shot should be given at 12 to 15 months of age followed by a second shot at 4 to 6 years of age. The second shot will increase the number of children completely protected against varicella and reduce or possibly get rid of outbreaks altogether. The ACIP also recommended that children, adolescents and adults who have already received one shot should receive a second shot.

There are several things you can do as a parent to keep your child from getting chickenpox and to protect others who may be at risk for severe illness from a varicella infection.

Take Action

- Take your child to the doctor for a second varicella shot.
- If your child has a rash (more than five to ten bumps), keep your child home from school until cleared by your healthcare provider.
- If a varicella outbreak occurs at your school, follow the instructions of the school nurse or staff.
- Teach your children good handwashing skills, to cover coughs and sneezes and to throw away used tissues.

¹ Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices Meeting Minutes – Varicella Vaccine. June 29-30, 2006. Atlanta, Georgia. ■

Vaccine Recommendations – Gold Standards that Guide Practices, Registries and School Requirements

As a parent, you may often wonder how decisions are made about which vaccines (shots) your child should get and when? You may also wonder about the difference between which vaccines are recommended for your child and which vaccines are required for your child to enter school.

The vaccine recommendations come from the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). This group is made up of experts from all over the country (doctors in public and private practice, professional organizations* and research experts) who meet three times every year to discuss the latest research on all vaccines (childhood, adolescent and adult).

Gold Standard for Practices

Once a vaccine is approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the ACIP reviews the research on the age group licensed to receive it, how many shots are needed for the best protection, any side effects and discusses issues regarding cost and supply. Based on this research, ACIP makes written recommendations which become the Gold Standard for doctors, nurses and other healthcare providers.

Gold Standard for Georgia Registry of Immunization Transactions and Services (GRITS)

Once the ACIP makes recommendations for the shots your child should receive, this information is included in the GRITS system and guides providers on which shots a child should receive and at what age. The GRITS program allows for you and your child to have a shot history stored in a computer database that is kept safe and secure. This registry allows doctors' offices, clinics and schools to access your child's shot history quickly and easily, making sure your child does not receive too many OR not enough shots.

Gold Standard for School and Child Care Requirements

Once a vaccine becomes licensed by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the new vaccine is usually not required for school or child care attendance right away. The decision to require a shot for school or child care entry is one that is considered carefully over time. HOWEVER, even if a shot is not required for school or child care entry, your child should still receive the recommended shot.

Information about Georgia's vaccine requirements for children to enter school or child care:

- Children enrolling for the first time in a Georgia school at any grade or level must have received all the required shots at the right age.

- Children are required to have protection against the following diseases:

Hepatitis B	Polio	Diphtheria
Measles	Tetanus	Mumps
Pertussis	Rubella	Varicella (chicken pox)
<i>Haemophilus Influenzae</i> type b (HIB) – children under age 5		

- Shots that are recommended by the ACIP but not currently required for child care or school attendance:

Hepatitis A	Meningococcal
Influenza	Rotavirus
Pneumococcal- children under age 5	
Human Papillomavirus (HPV) – females 11 to 26 years of age	

- Georgia vaccine requirements can be found on the Georgia Immunization Program's Website under the "Parental Resources" section at <http://health.state.ga.us/programs/immunization/>.
- Required shots should be documented on a Certificate of Immunization (3231). Currently, the 3231 lists only those shots that are required for school attendance. GRITS will print out the 3231 immunization certificate, based on these requirements.
- The 3231 is not a substitute for a personal shot record, which should be kept as a permanent record by the parent. A personal shot record should include all shots provided, both recommended and required.

A note about exemptions:

- Medical Exemptions are used only when a child has a medical condition that keeps him from being able to receive a specific vaccine. The 3231 certificate should show an expiration date of no more than one year.
- Religious Exemptions must be documented by a notarized statement signed by the parent or guardian stating that immunizations are not being given based on a religious belief. The notarized statement must be kept on file by the school or facility in place of a Form 3231 and does not expire.

For additional questions about Georgia Immunization Requirements, please call 404-657-3158.

* American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP). ■