Varicella (Chickenpox) Vaccine

This sheet is about exposure to the varicella vaccine in pregnancy and while breastfeeding. This information should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare providers.

What is varicella (chickenpox)?

Varicella, commonly called chickenpox, is a viral infection that usually happens in childhood. Chickenpox is very contagious, meaning it can spread easily from person to person. The best way to prevent chickenpox infection is through vaccination. For more information, see the MotherToBaby fact sheet on chickenpox at: https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/varicella/.

What is the varicella (chickenpox) vaccine?

The varicella vaccine is an injection that contains live varicella virus that has been made too weak to make you sick. It is given in two doses. The varicella vaccine causes your body to make antibodies to the virus that will protect you from getting sick from the virus in the future.

Can the varicella vaccine make it harder for me to get pregnant?

Based on the data available, it is not known if the varicella vaccine can make it harder to become pregnant.

I just got the varicella vaccine. How long should I wait before becoming pregnant?

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices of the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that a woman wait one month after getting the varicella vaccine before becoming pregnant. There are reports of healthy babies born to women who became pregnant one month or sooner after getting the chickenpox vaccine.

I am pregnant. Can I be vaccinated against chickenpox with the varicella vaccine?

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices of the CDC does not recommend pregnant women get live virus vaccines due to theoretical concerns.

Does getting the varicella vaccine increase the chance for miscarriage?

Miscarriage can occur in any pregnancy. Based on the data available, it is not known if getting the varicella vaccine increases the chance for miscarriage.

Does getting the varicella vaccine increase the chance of birth defects?

Every pregnancy starts out with a 3-5% chance of having a birth defect. This is called the background risk. The company who makes the vaccine had a registry of pregnant women who received the vaccine. At the close of the registry in 2013, there were pregnancy outcomes on 966 women who received the vaccine. Birth defects were not seen more often than what would be expected in the general population. Additional studies have not shown an increased rate of birth defects.

Could getting the varicella vaccine cause other pregnancy complications?

No complications of pregnancy have been reported in studies of pregnant people who have received the varicella vaccine.

Does getting the varicella vaccine in pregnancy cause long-term problems in behavior or learning for the baby?

Studies available have not found long term problems for children of people who received the varicella vaccine in pregnancy.

I am pregnant and have never had chickenpox. Is it okay for my child to get the chickenpox vaccine?

The American Academy of Pediatrics states that pregnancy in a mother or other household member is not felt to be a
reason to avoid giving a child the vaccine. Some people get a rash after they get the vaccine. Only when this rash is present is there a chance to infect someone else. Children with weakened immune systems (e.g. from cancer therapy) can pass the virus on to others, who can then develop a mild case of chickenpox.

To date, no cases of chickenpox have occurred after exposure to healthy children who have received the varicella vaccine.

**Can I breastfeed after getting the varicella vaccine?**

The chickenpox virus has not been found in breast milk of women receiving the vaccine. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all of your breastfeeding questions.

**If a male gets the varicella vaccine, can it make it harder to get a partner pregnant or increase the chance of birth defects?**

There are no studies looking at possible risks to a pregnancy when a male has received the varicella vaccine. In general, exposures that fathers or sperm donors have are unlikely to increase risks to a pregnancy. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet Paternal Exposures at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/.

Please click here for references.