Varicella (Chickenpox) Vaccine

This sheet is about exposure to the varicella vaccine in pregnancy and while breastfeeding. This information is based on published research studies. It should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare provider.

What is varicella (chickenpox)?

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

What is the varicella (chickenpox) vaccine?

The varicella vaccine is an injection (shot) that contains varicella virus that is live but weakened (also called a live-attenuated vaccine). 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?

It is not known if the varicella vaccine can make it harder to get pregnant.

I just got the varicella vaccine. How long should I wait before trying to get pregnant?

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that the varicella vaccine series is completed at least one month or more before pregnancy. There are reports of becoming pregnant one month or sooner after getting the varicella vaccine and healthy babies being born.

I am pregnant. Can I get the varicella vaccine?

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices of the CDC do not recommend getting live virus vaccines during pregnancy due to theoretical (not proven) concerns.

Does getting the varicella vaccine increase the chance of miscarriage?

Miscarriage is common and can occur in any pregnancy for many different reasons. It is not known if getting the varicella vaccine can increase the chance of miscarriage.

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

Birth defects can happen in any pregnancy for different reasons. Out of all babies born each year, about 3 out of 100 (3%) will have a birth defect. We look at research studies to try to understand if an exposure, like getting the varicella vaccine, might increase the chance of birth defects in pregnancy. The vaccine manufacturer collected information about pregnancy outcomes for 966 women who received the vaccine. No increased chance of birth defects was reported. Other studies have not shown an increased chance of birth defects.

Does getting the varicella vaccine in pregnancy increase the chance of other pregnancy-related problems?

It is not known if the varicella vaccine can increase the chance of other pregnancy-related problems, such as preterm delivery (birth before week 37) or low birth weight (weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces [2500 grams] at birth). No complications of pregnancy have been reported in studies of people who were pregnant who have received the varicella vaccine.

Does getting the varicella vaccine in pregnancy affect future behavior or learning for the child?

Studies have not been done to see if the varicella vaccine can affect future behavior or learning for the child.

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

The American Academy of Pediatrics states that living in the same household with a pregnant woman is not a reason for a child or other household member to avoid getting the varicella vaccine.

Some people get a rash after they get the varicella vaccine. When a rash is present, there is a chance to infect someone else with varicella. 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. Talk with your healthcare provider and your child's pediatrician about the best time for your child to get the varicella vaccine.

Breastfeeding after getting the varicella vaccine:

Breastfeeding is not usually a reason to avoid getting the varicella vaccine. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all your breastfeeding questions.

If a man gets the varicella vaccine, could it affect fertility or increase the chance of birth defects?

Studies have not been done to see if the varicella vaccine could affect men's fertility (ability to get a woman pregnant) or increase the chance of birth defects. 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.

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