

Mission:

To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.



Rick Scott
Governor

John H. Armstrong, MD, FACS
State Surgeon General & Secretary

Vision: To be the **Healthiest State** in the Nation

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Dear Parents or Guardians:

The Florida Department of Health in Pinellas County has seen an increase in the number of cases of varicella (chickenpox) in the community. To protect yourself and those around you, we are recommending that you consult with your family physician to verify your child's immunization status. The varicella vaccine is given in two doses and follows the following schedule depending on age.

Children under 13 years of age:

- 1st dose at 12-15 months of age
- 2nd dose at 4-6 years of age

Anyone 13 years of age and older:

- Two doses given at least 28 days apart

Chickenpox is a highly contagious illness that is spread by coughing and sneezing (like a cold), or by touching items that have saliva on them. It can also be spread by contact with fluid from the rash blisters, but this is not common. It is usually a mild disease, but people who have not had chickenpox, people with weakened immune systems, and pregnant women are at risk for severe disease and complications. These people should not wait for the rash to appear and should contact their provider right away for advice.

Chickenpox can begin with flu-like symptoms including fever and malaise. These first symptoms typically appear 10-21 days after a person is exposed. In children, the first symptoms may be a rash that typically begins on the head, chest, and back and then moves to the rest of the body. Some individuals with chickenpox have very mild symptoms with few lesions, particularly in healthy children that have been previously vaccinated. The rash heals by scabbing over; when the last blister has scabbed over the child is no longer contagious.

After infection, the varicella virus lies dormant in the body and can be reactivated as shingles later in life. Shingles infection is contagious and anyone who has not had chickenpox and is exposed to the virus may develop chickenpox as a result.

Immunization is the best preventive measure against chickenpox. The vaccine is 70-90% effective in preventing mild disease, and 95% effective in preventing severe disease. If you have any questions, please call the Epidemiology Program at the Florida Department of Health in Pinellas County at (727) 824-6932.