

Varicella Immune Globulin

Vaccines have saved more lives in Canada in the last 60 years than any other medical intervention. They help your immune system to recognize and fight bacteria and viruses that cause diseases.

What is varicella immune globulin?

Varicella immune globulin has large amounts of varicella antibodies taken from donated human blood. Antibodies are proteins that a person's immune system makes to fight pathogens like bacteria and viruses.

If given with 4 days of exposure, varicella immune globulin provides immediate, short-term protection against chicken pox (caused by the *Varicella zoster* virus) or shingles (caused by the *Herpes zoster* virus) in susceptible individuals. It can prevent infection or make the disease less severe.

Is varicella immune globulin safe?

Yes, varicella immune globulin is a very safe human blood product. Canadian Blood Services screens and tests every blood donation. Since blood screening and testing began, there have been no reports of blood-borne infections like HIV or hepatitis B in persons receiving varicella immune globulin.

Who should get varicella immune globulin?

The following susceptible individuals who have been exposed to varicella disease may be advised to receive varicella immune globulin because they are at increased risk of severe varicella disease and its complications:

- Susceptible pregnant women.
- Newborn infants whose mothers develop varicella disease 5 days before to 48 hours after delivery.
- Infants and children in neonatal or pediatric intensive care settings, as determined by infectious disease/infection control specialist.
- Individuals who are immunocompromised because of medical treatment or disease, as determined by their physicians and/or specialists.

Who should not get varicella immune globulin?

- Persons with known immunity to varicella zoster virus (from previous varicella infections or varicella immunization).
- Persons who have had a life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of an immune globulin or who have severe allergies to any of the varicella immune globulin components.
- Who are deficient in IgA as they may have the potential to develop IgA antibodies and have an anaphylactic reaction. Physician consultation is required.

Note: Immune globulin can interfere with some vaccines. Speak with a public health nurse, nurse practitioner or physician if you have been vaccinated for measles, mumps, rubella, chickenpox, shingles or other live vaccine within the past 14 days or if you receive these vaccines in the future.

What are common reactions to varicella immune globulin?

- Temporary pain and tenderness at the injection site.
- Headache, rash, joint or muscle aches, chills, tiredness, nausea, vomiting, or flushing may occur.
- Rarely, blood clots may occur after the administration of an immune globulin product.
- Only treat a fever (at least 6 to 8 hours after immunization) if your child is uncomfortable, refusing fluids and not sleeping.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol, Tempra) may be given for fever or soreness. ASA (Aspirin) must NOT be given to anyone younger than 18 years old because of the risk of Reye syndrome.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting varicella immune globulin because there is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. **If this happens after you leave the clinic, call 911 or the local emergency number.** This reaction can be treated, and occurs in less than one in one million people who get varicella immune globulin.

What does varicella immune globulin contain?

VariZIG® contains freeze-dried varicella zoster immune globulin (human), maltose and polysorbate 80. Preservative and latex-free.

Who should you report reactions to?

- Report any adverse or unexpected reactions to your local public health nurse, your doctor, or nurse practitioner as soon as possible.

Talk to a public health nurse:

- If you have questions or concerns about you or your child's reaction to an immunization.
- If you or your child had to go to a doctor, a hospital or to a health centre with a symptom that might be related to immunization.

Mature Minor Consent

It is recommended that parents/guardians discuss consent for treatment with their children. Efforts are first made to get parental/guardian consent for treatment. However, children at least 13 years of age up to and including 17 years of age, who are able to understand the benefits and possible reactions for each product and the risks of not getting treatment, can legally consent to or refuse treatment in Saskatchewan by providing mature minor informed consent to a healthcare provider.

Provincial immunization fact sheets are available at www.saskatchewan.ca/immunize.

For more information contact your local public health office, your physician, nurse practitioner, HealthLine online or by calling 811.

References: VariZIG® product monograph (2018).