

August 2011

Vaccines (also called “needles” or “baby shots”) are the best way to protect against some very serious infections. The Canadian Paediatric Society and the National Advisory Committee on Immunization strongly recommend routine immunization.

The MMRV vaccine is a four-in-one needle that protects against measles, mumps, rubella (German measles) and varicella (chickenpox). Routinely, it is given at 4 to 6 years of age. Vaccination against measles, mumps, and rubella is required by law for all children attending daycare or school in Ontario (unless exempted).

What is Measles (Red Measles)?

Measles is a serious viral infection that spreads easily from an infected person to others through coughing, sneezing and even talking. It begins with fever, cough, red runny eyes and a runny nose and then progresses to a red rash that begins on the face and spreads to the rest of the body. Ear infections or pneumonia (lung infection) can happen in one out of every 10 children with measles. Measles can also result in lung and brain infections that can cause brain damage and death. Pregnant women have a risk of miscarriage or premature birth if infected.

What is Mumps?

Mumps is a serious viral infection that spreads the same way as measles. Mumps can cause swelling and pain in one or more salivary glands (usually at the sides of the face, near the angle of the jaw). Most people recover from their illness but the infection can result in complications including: an infection of the brain or lining of the brain (meningitis), ovaries, breasts or pancreas. Deafness can be a rare complication. As well, one in three men develops infection in their testicles. Although very rare, some of these men may end up with infertility. Pregnant women who get mumps during the first trimester are at increased risk of miscarriage.

What is Rubella (German Measles)?

Rubella spreads by contact with an infected person through coughing, sneezing, or talking to them. Rubella is a concern for pregnant women in their first trimester as the baby may be born with birth defects.

These birth defects may include heart disease, cataracts, deafness and mental disabilities. In children, rubella is a mild illness that causes fever, swollen glands in the neck and a rash. Rubella can be followed by chronic arthritis. It can also cause temporary blood clotting problems and swelling of the brain.

What is Varicella?

Chickenpox (varicella) is a contagious disease caused by a virus. Early symptoms may include fever, tiredness and loss of appetite. One to two days later, an itchy rash will develop consisting of up to several hundred blister-like sores (called pox). Although rare, complications of chickenpox include skin infections, scars, swelling of the brain and pneumonia. Chickenpox is usually more severe in adolescents and adults. A person who has had chickenpox can develop a painful rash, called shingles, years later.

Why is the MMRV vaccine important?

The MMRV vaccine offers parents an option to have their child immunized against four diseases in one vaccine. This vaccine reduces the number of injections for children.

In Ontario, children are eligible to receive the publicly funded MMRV vaccine from four to 11 years of age to protect against measles, mumps, rubella and chickenpox.

How well does the MMRV protect against measles, mumps, rubella and/or chickenpox?

Most children who receive two doses of vaccine against these four diseases will be protected against all of them. Protection from measles, mumps and rubella after getting the vaccine is probably life long. However, sometimes children may acquire the infection after vaccination, but the disease will be milder.

Is the MMRV vaccine safe?

The MMRV vaccine is considered a safe vaccine; most children will have no side effects. Some common side effects from the MMRV include redness, swelling and tenderness in the area where the needle is given. Fever, and/or a rash can occur four to 12 days after getting the vaccine. The rash can be a blotchy red rash (measles like) and/or spots that look like blisters (chickenpox). Severe reactions are rare.

Who should not have the MMRV vaccine?

- Anyone whose immune system is weakened from disease or medications.
- Anyone who is ill with a fever or infection worse than a cold.
- Anyone who has had an allergic reaction after receiving the MMRV, MMR or chickenpox (varicella) vaccines in the past.
- Anyone who is allergic to an antibiotic called neomycin.

Inform the nurse if you have any of the following:

- You are allergic to eggs or egg products.
- You are receiving the following drugs: aspirin or aspirin-containing drugs, acyclovir, valacyclovir or famciclovir.
- You are known to have problems with low platelets.
- You have a bleeding disorder or are taking medication that could affect blood clotting.
- You have received blood or blood products within the past 12 months.
- You have received another vaccine in the past 3 months.

When should I call my health care provider?

Call your health care provider or go to the nearest hospital emergency department if your child has any of the following reactions within three days of receiving the vaccine:

- hives;
- swelling of the face or mouth;
- trouble breathing, hoarseness or wheezing;
- high fever (over 40°C);
- convulsions or seizures; or
- other serious symptoms (e.g., paraesthesia).

After receiving the MMRV vaccine:

- You will be asked to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes.
- You should not have a TB skin test within the next 4 weeks and should not have another live vaccine within the next 6 weeks to 3 months, depending on the vaccine.
- Aspirin-containing drugs should not be taken for 6 weeks after the MMRV vaccine unless prescribed by a physician who knows that the child received the MMRV vaccine because aspirin may increase the risk of a condition called Reye's Syndrome.
- The antiviral drugs acyclovir, valacyclovir and famciclovir should be avoided from 48 hours before receiving the MMRV vaccine to 4 weeks after receiving MMRV, if possible, because these drugs may decrease the effectiveness of the vaccine.
- Receiving blood or blood products within 4 weeks after the MMRV vaccine may decrease the effectiveness of the vaccine.

Whom should I talk to if I have any more questions about the MMRV vaccine?

Talk to your family health care provider or the Huron County Health Unit (519-482-3416) for more information.

Your Record of Protection

After your child receives any immunization, make sure the doctor updates the yellow personal Immunization Record card. Keep it in a safe place!