



3.3.2 Chickenpox (Varicella)



A large proportion of immigrant youth are susceptible to chickenpox (varicella). Evidence indicates that up to 50% of youth at age 15 who are immigrants from tropical countries are at risk – and particularly at increased risk of severe illness. The average age at which chickenpox develops varies for different world regions: older children/youth are more likely to get chickenpox in tropical countries – the average age of onset is 15 years – while in temperate and cold countries the average age of acquiring chickenpox is 5 years.

Implications

Pregnant immigrant women and their babies are at particular risk for complications of chickenpox – up to 50% of babies born with congenital varicella are likely to die and survivors may have congenital anomalies.¹ For most children, being immunized against chickenpox means that they will never get the disease. For others, being immunized means that if they do get chickenpox, it will be very mild, and they will recover quickly.²

Canadian Immigrant Health Guidelines recommend that all immigrant children younger than 13 years be vaccinated with the chickenpox (varicella) vaccine without prior blood testing. It is also recommended that all immigrant and refugee children, youth and adults from tropical countries over 13 years be screened for serum varicella antibodies, and that those found to be susceptible (not yet immune) be immunized.³

For the Canadian Immigrant Health Guidelines [click here](#).

¹Pottie K, Greenaway C, Feightner J, et al. Evidence-based clinical guidelines for immigrants and refugees. CMAJ 2011;183:E824-925.

²Public Health Agency of Canada. What you need to know about varicella (chickenpox). <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/im/ivc-vve/faq-dis-mal/varicell-eng.php>

³Pottie K, Greenaway C, Feightner J, et al. Evidence-based clinical guidelines for immigrants and refugees. CMAJ 2011;183:E824-925

