Recommendation on Varicella Vaccine (Chicken Pox)

The American College Health Association (ACHA) recommends that all entering college students without history of the disease or without age appropriate immunization or with a negative antibody titer be given the varicella vaccine. The varicella vaccine was approved by the Food and Drug Administration on March 17, 1995.

Who should receive the vaccine?
Adolescents and adults who do not have evidence of previous varicella either by history, vaccination, or titer.

Students entering health profession and occupations with exposure to young children should have a history of having chicken pox, have a protective varicella titer or receive the vaccine.

Who should not receive the vaccine?
Individuals with
- Hypersensitivity to any component of the vaccine, including gelatin
- A history of anaphylactic reaction to neomycin.
- Primary or secondary immunodeficiency states (including people with AIDS)
- A family history of congenital or hereditary immunodeficiency.
- Active untreated tuberculosis.
- Any active febrile illness.
- Pregnant women (pregnancy should also be avoided for three months after vaccination)
- Also, with certain exceptions, the vaccine should not be given to individuals with blood dyscrasias, leukemia, lymphoma of any type, or other malignant neoplasms affecting the bone marrow or lymphatic systems.

What are the dosage requirements?
The dosage for adolescents and adults of “Varivax” is two 0.5ml doses ministered subcutaneously four to eight weeks apart. Blood tests in adolescents and adults showed antibodies present in 97.2 percent of cases one year after receiving the two doses. The long-term duration of protection is not known at this time, but limited clinical data suggests immunity persisting for at least six years. At this time it is not known if a “booster dose” will be required.
**What are the possible side effects?**

In clinical trials involving adolescents and adults, the vaccine was generally well tolerated, although occasional side effects were observed. The most common adverse effects involved the injection site; these included redness, swelling, varicella-type rash, itching and induration. Fever and a generalized mild chicken-pox-type rash were less common.

As with any vaccine, breakthrough cases of chicken pox after the vaccination have occurred. Studies reported 2.1 having breakthrough cases; however, most were considered mild.

**What are storage requirements?**

Storage requirements are relatively stringent.

- The vaccine must remain frozen at an average temperature of 5 degrees F or colder
- Daily temperature readings of the freezer must be recorded.
- After the vaccine is reconstituted, it must be given within 30 minutes.
- Frozen vaccine has a shelf life of 18 months.

**What does it cost?**

The current price for Varivax is approximately $70 for a single dose, with a slight savings on orders of ten doses or more.

**Need more information?**

If you need more information or want to order the vaccine, Merck Vaccine Division has set up a hotline, **(800) 982-7482.**