

Period of infectivity

The patient is infectious from one day before to 3-5 days after onset of symptoms.

Clinical features

Influenza is characterised by sudden onset of symptoms with fever, headache, muscle weakness, sore throat and dry cough and lasts 2-7 days. The most frequent complication of influenza infection is pneumonia, most commonly secondary bacterial pneumonia. Primary influenza viral pneumonia is associated with a high death rate. Other complications include worsening of pre-existing chronic medical conditions such as chronic bronchitis or chronic heart failure. Death is reported in 0.5 - 1 per 1,000 cases of influenza. The majority of deaths occur in those over 65 years of age.

Vaccine schedule in Ireland

In Ireland vaccination is recommended for all patients over 65, healthcare workers with direct patient contact and high-risk groups as laid out in the national immunisation guidelines. In 2006, NIAC recommended reducing the age group to all those over 50 years and this will be implemented on a phased basis.

4.3.3 Varicella

Epidemiology of disease and impact of vaccination

Varicella (Chickenpox) is a highly infectious viral illness caused by the Varicella virus and characterised by a vesicular rash.

Transmission

Transmission is through direct or droplet contact with nasopharyngeal secretions of an infected person.

Incubation period

The incubation period ranges between 14 and 21 days.

Period of infectivity

A person can be infectious from 5 days before onset of rash until the vesicles are crusted (usually 5 days). The virus can lay dormant and reactivate in later life.

Herpes-Zoster (shingles) is caused by reactivation of the chickenpox virus. Virus from lesions can be transmitted to susceptible individuals to cause chickenpox but there is no evidence that herpes-zoster can be caused by another individual with chickenpox.

Vaccine recommendations in Ireland

The vaccine is recommended for at-risk groups including

- Healthcare workers without a definite history of chickenpox, or proof of immunity, particularly those working with haematology, oncology, obstetrical, general paediatric or neonatal patients
- Laboratory staff who may be exposed to varicella virus in the course of their work
- Healthy susceptible close household contacts of immunocompromised patients.

For further information consult with the National Immunisation Guidelines available at www.hpsc.ie