

UK experts recommend chickenpox shot for kids for the first time, decades after other countries

November 14 2023



A chickenpox (also known as varicella) vaccine sits next to syringes and ready for a student at a free immunization clinic at a Seattle public school on Dec. 30, 2019, in Seattle. An expert scientific committee advising the British government said for the first time Tuesday Nov. 14, 2023 that children should be immunized with the chickenpox vaccine decades after the shots were made widely available in other rich countries, including the U.S., Canada and Australia. Credit: AP

Photo/Elaine Thompson, File

An expert scientific committee advising the British government recommended for the first time Tuesday that children should be immunized with the chickenpox vaccine—decades after the shots were made widely available in other countries, including the U.S., Canada and Australia.

In Britain, those who want to be immunized against the disease have to pay about £150 (US \$184).

In a statement, Britain's Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation said that [children](#) between 1 year and 18 months should be offered two doses of the vaccine, in a shot that also combines protection against measles, mumps and rubella.

"For some babies, [young children](#) and even adults, chickenpox or its complications can be very serious, resulting in hospitalization and even death," said Andrew Pollard, chair of the expert vaccine group in a statement.

Pollard said that "decades of evidence" of the vaccine's effectiveness from other countries demonstrate the vaccine's safety; the U.S. was the first country to introduce an immunization program against chickenpox in 1995.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention describes chickenpox cases in the country as "rare," estimating there are fewer than 150,000 cases and 30 deaths every year.

British experts have previously estimated there are more than 650,000

cases of chickenpox in England and Wales.

Chickenpox is a highly infectious disease that mostly affects children and can cause an itchy rash, blisters and fever. Symptoms usually last about a week, but in rare cases, the virus can lead to pneumonia, encephalitis and even death. Two doses of the vaccine offer more than 90% protection against the disease.

The chickenpox vaccine recommendation will next be considered by the government.

Britain's National Health Service has long said that introducing the chickenpox vaccine might leave some adults vulnerable to shingles, if unvaccinated children catch the virus as adults, which can be more severe than chickenpox.

Experts noted, however, that Britain's government offers the shingles vaccine to adults at risk of the disease.

Dr. Gayatri Amirthalingam, deputy director of public health programs at Britain's Health Security Agency, said the new [chickenpox vaccine](#) recommendations would "help make chickenpox a problem of the past."

© 2023 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed without permission.

Citation: UK experts recommend chickenpox shot for kids for the first time, decades after other countries (2023, November 14) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-11-uk-experts-chickenpox-shot-kids.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.