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Panel recommends second chickenpox vaccination

http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory_35529.html

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention voted on Thursday to recommend a second dose of the chickenpox vaccine for children between 4 and 6 years of age.

Under current guidelines, just one dose is given between 12 and 18 months of age.

The ACIP is also recommending that adolescents and adults who have already received one dose of the vaccine be given another.

The panel is hopeful that this strategy will help reduce the number of chickenpox cases that have occurred in recent years among vaccinated children. According to a CDC press release, up to 20 percent of children who receive one dose are still susceptible to infection with varicella zoster, the virus that causes chickenpox.

Another motivation for the new recommendations was the waning of protection against the virus over time, leaving many adults susceptible to infection -- which is usually more severe at this age. A second dose of the vaccine provides - lasting protection.

Since the vaccine was licensed in 1995, chickenpox cases have dropped by 80 to 85 percent, hospitalizations because of the infection have declined by 72 percent, and varicella deaths among older adults have decreased by at least 75 percent.

Still, there is room for improvement, particularly regarding previously vaccinated individuals. In recent chickenpox outbreaks, up to 17 percent of vaccinated children developed varicella.

"We have made great progress in reducing chickenpox during the past 10 years," Dr. Anne Schuchat, director of CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, said in a statement. "This recommendation will further reduce outbreaks of chickenpox and provide better individual protection."

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