

# A Parent with Shingles Gives Chickenpox to Their Unvaccinated Kids



By Alex Berezow — September 9, 2016



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When I was a child, getting chickenpox was a rite of passage. Everyone had to get it, sooner or later, and sooner was preferable. The day I noticed in 2nd grade the itchy little bumps forming, I celebrated because I knew that it meant several days away from school.

Of course, after just a day or two of itchiness, I learned that chickenpox wasn't all that fun. Then, when I turned 30, [I suffered an outbreak of shingles](#) <sup>[1]</sup>, which was incredibly unpleasant. It was then that I wished the chickenpox vaccine had existed when I was a tot. And because the virus that causes chickenpox is a type of herpesvirus, it will live inside me forever, meaning that I could have an outbreak of shingles again at any time.

According to the CDC, in 2014, [95% of children from 13 to 17 years old](#) <sup>[2]</sup> had received at least one dose of the Varicella (chickenpox) vaccine. (Kids are supposed to receive two doses.) That's a good thing because, contrary to popular belief, chickenpox can be serious for some people. It killed roughly 100 to 150 and hospitalized more than 10,000 Americans every year in the early 1990s.

Despite the safety, efficacy, and availability of the Varicella vaccine, some parents inexplicably fail to vaccinate their children. Now, the CDC reports that a small outbreak has occurred in Michigan.

The outbreak began with a parent who was diagnosed with shingles on October 20, 2015. Despite acquiring first-hand knowledge of the pain and discomfort of shingles, the parent apparently took no significant action to protect his or her kids. One by one, each of the parent's kids came down with chickenpox: One on November 3rd, two on November 18th, one on November 22nd, and another on December 3rd.

And it gets worse. The child who was infected on December 3rd gave it to three other kids on a school bus, one of whom in turn infected a younger sibling. All of these kids were unvaccinated, except one who was fully vaccinated. (No vaccine is 100% effective. The [efficacy for two doses](#) [3] of the Varicella vaccine is 88% to 98%.)

So, one thoughtless parent's negligence led to the infection of nine kids. And because the [lifetime risk of shingles is about 1 in 3](#) [4], statistically, three of these children will go on to develop a painful rash later in life. Let's hope they grow up to be more responsible than their parents.

**Source** [5]: Hoch DE. "Notes from the Field. Varicella Outbreak Associated with Riding on a School Bus — Muskegon County, Michigan, 2015." *MMWR* 65 (35): 941–942. Published: 9-Sept-2016. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6535a4> [6]

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**Links**

[1] <http://www.realclearscience.com/blog/2012/05/how-does-a-healthy-30-year-old-get-shingles.html>

[2] <http://www.cdc.gov/chickenpox/surveillance/monitoring-varicella.html>

[3] <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/varicella/hcp-effective-duration.htm>

[4] <http://www.cdc.gov/features/shingles/>

[5] <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/wr/mm6535a4.htm>

[6] <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6535a4>