

Adverse effects of varicella vaccination are under-reported in VAERS, mitigating against discovery of the true-cost benefit

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Abstract

Varicella vaccination is generally considered safe but there are usually no prescreening tests to determine whether an adverse reaction is likely to occur. The literature contains a surprising number of adverse reactions following varicella vaccination including vaccine-strain HZ in children and adults. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) states, “VAERS data are limited by underreporting and unknown sensitivity of the reporting system, making it difficult to compare adverse event rates following vaccination reported to VAERS with those from complications following natural disease. Nevertheless, the magnitude of these differences makes it likely that serious adverse events following vaccination occur at a substantially lower rate than following natural disease.” Since follow-up is not conducted, it may be argued that some reports may not be attributed to or associated with vaccination and therefore the true rate of adverse events is essentially unknown. Nevertheless, adverse reactions reported in VAERS have typically been shown to be only 5% or 10% of the true rates. Cost-benefit analyses of the universal varicella vaccination program appear to be optimistic, especially when adverse vaccine reactions are completely ignored or excluded.

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