

# Do You Know What Breakthrough Varicella (Chickenpox) Looks Like?

## What is breakthrough varicella?

Breakthrough varicella is an infection with wild-type varicella zoster virus that occurs in a varicella vaccinated person more than 42 days after vaccination.

Varicella in an Unvaccinated Person



- 250–500 lesions
- Mostly vesicular
- Fever
- Illness for 5–7 days

Breakthrough Varicella



- <50 lesions
- Few or no vesicles
- No or low fever
- Shorter duration of illness

## How is breakthrough varicella confirmed?

The best method to confirm breakthrough varicella is laboratory PCR testing of skin lesion specimens—scabs, vesicular fluid, or scrapings of maculopapular lesions.  
[www.cdc.gov/chickenpox/lab-testing/](http://www.cdc.gov/chickenpox/lab-testing/)

## Why is breakthrough varicella hard to diagnose?

The rash caused by breakthrough varicella looks similar to other rashes, so it is often difficult to diagnose clinically.

Breakthrough Varicella



Insect Bites



Poison Ivy



Ringworm



**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**  
National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases