

About Qatar

- Qatar is a peninsula within the Arabian Peninsula. It borders Saudi Arabia to the south and is surrounded by the Persian Gulf.
- The capital city is Doha which is also the largest city. The total area of Qatar is 11,437 km².
- The official language is Arabic with English being spoken widely by many. Islam is the main religion of the country.
- Qatar is an emirate with a conventional hereditary system. The current Emir of Qatar is H.H. Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani.
- The population in 2007 was estimated to be 1,226,210. In recent years, Qatar has witnessed huge developments in many fields. This has increased the population of Qatar to meet the growing employment needs of the country. Immigrants make up approximately 79% of the population.



What is Chickenpox?

- Chickenpox is a highly infectious viral disease caused by the varicella-zoster virus (VZV), which usually results in lifetime immunity. It is common in children and some adults.
- Major symptoms of chickenpox include an itchy rash with small, watery blisters occurring on the skin.
- It can be transmitted through direct contact with an infected person's droplets, skin lesions, or respiratory secretions. Pregnant women can pass the VZV to their fetus during pregnancy.
- The average incubation period for chickenpox can range from 10 to 21 days.
- Newborn and immunocompromised individuals are at high risk for developing complications of chickenpox that can be severe and life threatening.

Acknowledgement

- Communicable Disease Control & Vaccination, Public Health Department, & Supreme Council of Health in Qatar

Chickenpox in Qatar

- According to 2007 Qatar Annual Health Report, there are higher reported cases of chickenpox among non-Qatari individuals (2924) than Qataris (622). One possible reason contributing to higher reported cases could be the labor class of Qatar.
- The labor class primarily represents domestic help, industrial and construction workers. Many times the labor class is unaware of their medical or immunization history. This along with the close living conditions of the workers leads to a greater chance for spreading chickenpox. Another possibility for higher rates could be when non-Qatari individuals become infected while visiting their home country and then coming back to Qatar.
- Reported cases of chickenpox are higher among males (2524) than females (1022) since males are the majority among the population of Qatar.
- According to age groups, chickenpox is concentrated mainly among adults and children. (Figure 1)
- The number of infected adults between the age of 20 to 39 was 1657 cases among the total of 3546 reported cases.
- Chickenpox in childhood is very common. There were 1464 childhood (ages 1 to 14) cases among the total of 3546 cases. This can be related to the number of children who are not vaccinated against the virus.
- Chickenpox, the most common infectious disease in Qatar has economic impacts. Since high number of infected people are from the working class group, companies are impacted by loss of work days and bear costs for the treatment of chickenpox. Parents of infected children are also impacted since they will have to miss work days to care for their child.
- Qatar spends a lot of money on infected people that require hospitalizations, vaccination coverage, and on preventative strategies to reducing the spread of chickenpox.

Prevention Strategies

- The most important prevention strategy against chickenpox is immunization.
- Treatment of chickenpox consists of antiviral agents with supportive care. The development of the varicella immunoglobulin is now used for the prevention of VZV which can decrease morbidity and health care costs.
- Qatar was the first in the middle east region to introduce the chickenpox vaccine to the population in 2002.
- Varicella vaccine (marketed as Varilrix®) is available for Qatar's population by primary health centers, hospitals and Qatar's Medical Commission.
- A single 0.5 ml injection of varicella vaccine is recommended for children aged 12 months to 12 years.
- Adults and adolescents are recommended to take two 0.5 ml injections four to eight weeks apart. It shows promises in preventing chickenpox if given within 3 days for recently infected people.
- Expanded Program of Immunization (EPI) was launched by WHO in 1978 and was established in Qatar in 1979. Since then, there has been a tremendous increase in the immunization coverage for all of EPI diseases including varicella. In 2007, 92% of infants less than 1 year of age were given the varicella vaccine.
- Qatar's Communicable Disease Control & Vaccination Department of Preventative Health plays a major role in tracking and reporting the incidence of chickenpox as well as spreading awareness to the public through health promotion and publications.
- Widespread immunity to chickenpox has resulted from vaccination of most children.

Figure 1. Number of reported chickenpox cases by age groups (2007)

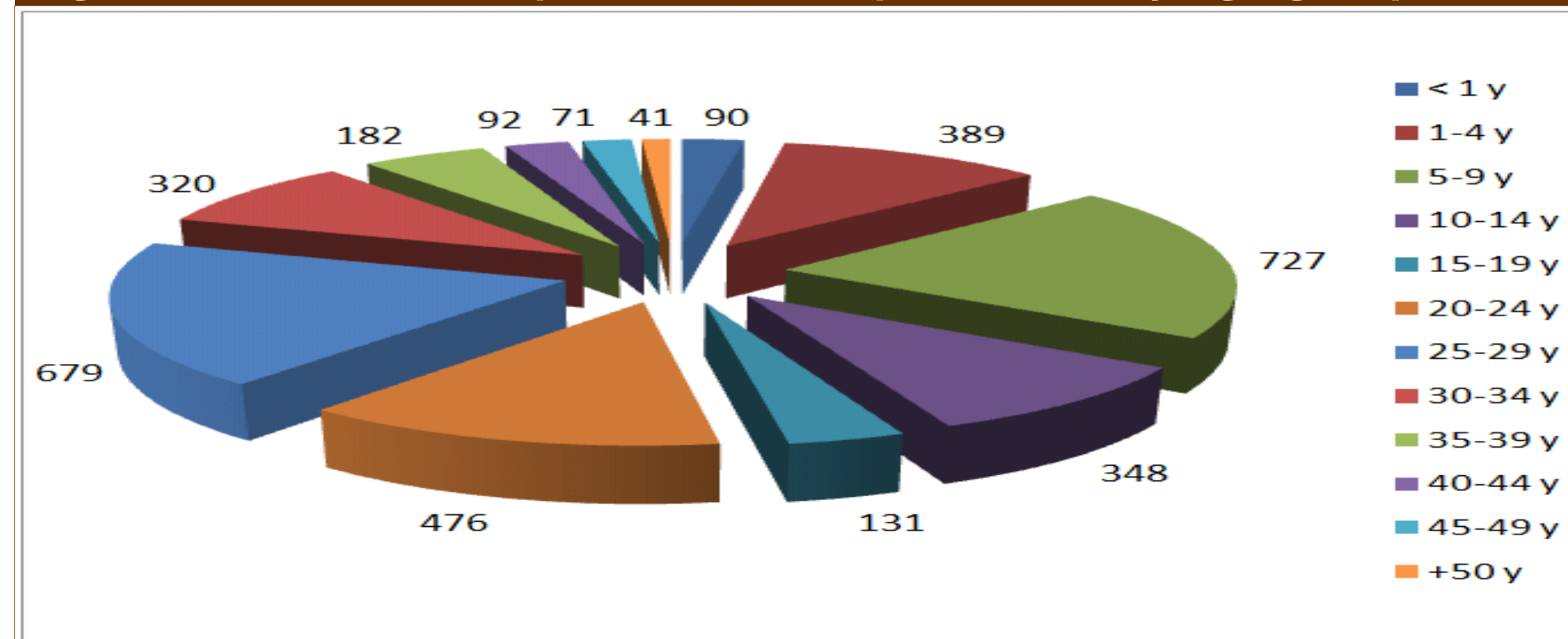


Table 1. Current Immunization schedule in Qatar

Age	Vaccine(s)
At Birth	BCG, HBV0
2 months	HBV1*, DTP1+HIB1*, OPV1, PCV1, Rota 1
4 months	HBV2*, DTP2+HIB2*, OPV2, PCV2, Rota 2
6 months	HBV3*, DTP3+HIB3*, OPV3, PCV3
12 months	MMR1, VARICELLA
18 months	DTP1B + HIB B, OPV1B, PCVB
4-6yrs	DT2B, OPV2B, MMR2
11-12yrs	Td3B