

<http://uk.news.yahoo.com/020502/80/cy5c0.html>

Thursday May 2, 04:27 PM

Death risk from chickenpox jab

By Richard Woodman

Click to enlarge photo

LONDON (Reuters) - Vaccinating children against chickenpox could cause millions of adults to develop shingles, according to scientists.

A team at the Public Health Laboratory Service said on Thursday that although vaccination would save thousands of children's lives, just as many adults could die from the complications of shingles.

After a bout of chickenpox, the varicella zoster virus remains dormant in the body and may reactivate decades later to cause shingles, a painful rash that typically strikes chickenpox veterans after the age of 60.

Marc Brisson and his team say their research shows that adults living with children have more exposure to the virus and enjoy high levels of protection against shingles.

Being close to children means that adults keep being exposed to the virus, which acts like a booster vaccine against shingles, they believe.

But if all children were vaccinated, adults who have had chickenpox would no longer be protected against developing shingles.

Writing in the journal *Vaccine*, they called for a re-evaluation of the policy of mass chickenpox vaccination that has been introduced already in the United States and is imminent in many other countries.

The researchers worked out a mathematical model which predicts that eliminating chickenpox in a country the size of the United States would prevent 186 million cases of the disease and 5,000 deaths over 50 years.

However they said it could also result in 21 million more cases of shingles and, again, 5,000 deaths.

The PHLS said in a statement it was working out what the impact might be of introducing a chickenpox vaccine in Britain.

"As more evidence becomes available, it will be shared with the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) which advises the Department of Health on the immunisation schedule."