



## Shingles Vaccine

### What is the shingles vaccine?

The shingles vaccine protects against herpes zoster, more commonly referred to as shingles. Shingles are caused by the varicella zoster virus, which also causes chickenpox. The vaccine is approved by Health Canada.

### Who should get the shingles vaccine?

The shingles vaccine is recommended for people 60 years of age and older, however anyone 50 years of age and older can get the vaccine. Only 1 dose is needed for protection.

### How can I get the shingles vaccine?

You can buy the shingles vaccine at some travel clinics or pharmacies for between \$150-195. Some health insurance plans may cover the cost of the vaccine; check with your health care provider. If you buy the vaccine at a travel clinic, a doctor or nurse on site will be able to immunize you. Some pharmacists in B.C. are also able to immunize.

If you want to be immunized by your doctor, find out if they have a supply of the shingles vaccine. If your doctor does not have a supply, you will need a prescription to pick up the vaccine from a pharmacy and bring it to your doctor's office. The vaccine must be kept frozen before use.

### What are the benefits of getting the shingles vaccine?

The shingles vaccine is the best way to protect you from getting shingles. The vaccine has been shown to reduce the risk of getting shingles by 50%.

For those who still get shingles after being immunized, the vaccine can reduce pain,

including the type of pain that lingers after shingles.

### What are possible reactions after the vaccine?

The shingles vaccine is very safe. There is no evidence that it can cause shingles. Common reactions to the vaccine may include soreness, redness, swelling, itching, or a rash where the shot was given. Some people experience headaches or fever.

Acetaminophen or Tylenol<sup>®</sup> can be given for fever or soreness. ASA or Aspirin<sup>®</sup> should NOT be given to anyone under 20 years of age due to the risk of Reye Syndrome.

For more information on Reye Syndrome, see HealthLinkBC File [#84 Reye Syndrome](#).

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This reaction may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this happens after you leave the clinic, call 9-1-1 or the local emergency number. This reaction can be treated, and occurs in less than 1 in a million people who get the vaccine.

It is important to always report serious or unexpected reactions to your health care provider.

### Who should not get the shingles vaccine?

Speak with a health care provider if you:

- have had a life-threatening reaction to any component of the vaccine including gelatin or neomycin;

- have an immune system weakened by disease or medical treatment;
- have active, untreated tuberculosis; or
- are pregnant or breastfeeding

If you are ill and have a fever greater than 38.5°C (101.3°F) you should wait until you have recovered before getting the shingles vaccine.

### What is shingles?

Shingles is a painful skin rash with blisters. It is caused by the varicella zoster virus, the same virus that causes chickenpox. In some people who have had chickenpox, the virus becomes active again later in life and causes shingles. About 1 out of 3 people will get shingles in their lifetime.

Shingles is more common in people over 50 years of age or in those with immune systems weakened by medication or disease.

Shingles usually appears as a rash on one side of the face or body. The rash may last for 2 to 4 weeks. Before the rash appears, some people may experience pain, itching or tingling of the skin. Other early symptoms of shingles include fever, headache, nausea, and chills. The most common symptom of shingles is pain which can be severe.

About 1 in 5 people who get shingles may have severe pain that lasts months to years after the rash has cleared. This is known as post-herpetic neuralgia.

Rare complications of shingles include pneumonia, loss of hearing or vision, scarring, inflammation of the brain (encephalitis) or death.

You cannot get shingles from someone who has shingles. However, it is possible for someone who has not had chickenpox or the chickenpox vaccine to get chickenpox from someone with shingles. This is uncommon and requires direct contact with the fluid from the shingles blisters.

For more information about chickenpox and how it can be spread, see HealthLinkBC File [#44a Facts About Chickenpox](#).

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For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

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