

## Shingles Vaccines

Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other health measure.

### What are the shingles vaccines?

There are 2 vaccines, Shingrix<sup>®</sup> and Zostavax<sup>®</sup> II, that protect against shingles. Shingles is caused by the varicella zoster virus, which also causes chickenpox. Zostavax<sup>®</sup> II contains a weakened form of the virus while Shingrix<sup>®</sup> contains only a part of the virus. The vaccines are approved by Health Canada.

### Who should get the shingles vaccine?

Shingrix<sup>®</sup> is recommended for adults 50 years of age and older. This includes those who have had shingles or received Zostavax<sup>®</sup> II. You should wait at least 1 year before getting Shingrix<sup>®</sup> if you had shingles or received Zostavax<sup>®</sup> II.

Zostavax<sup>®</sup> II may be given to adults 50 years of age and older who cannot get Shingrix<sup>®</sup> due to a life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of the vaccine or to any part of the vaccine.

### How can I get the shingles vaccine?

You can buy the shingles vaccine at most pharmacies and travel clinics. Shingrix<sup>®</sup> is given as a series of 2 doses, 2 to 6 months apart, and costs about \$150/dose. Zostavax<sup>®</sup> II is given as 1 dose and costs about \$200. Some health insurance plans may cover the cost of the vaccine; check with your provider.

If you buy the vaccine at a travel clinic, a doctor or nurse on site will be able to immunize you. Most 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.

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

The shingles vaccines are the best way to protect you from getting shingles. The vaccines have been shown to reduce the risk of getting shingles by 50% for Zostavax<sup>®</sup> II, and to more than 90% for Shingrix<sup>®</sup>.

For those who still get shingles after being immunized, the vaccines can reduce pain, including the type of pain that lasts after shingles.

### What are the possible reactions after the vaccine?

The shingles vaccines are very safe. Common reactions to the vaccines include headache as well as soreness, redness and swelling where the vaccine was given. Itching and a rash may also occur after getting Zostavax<sup>®</sup> II. Other reactions that may occur after getting Shingrix<sup>®</sup> include fever, muscle soreness, fatigue, shivering, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

Acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol<sup>®</sup>) or ibuprofen (e.g. Advil<sup>®</sup>) can be given for fever or soreness. ASA (e.g. Aspirin<sup>®</sup>) should not be given to anyone under 18 years of age due to the risk of Reye Syndrome.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is an extremely rare possibility, less than 1 in a million, of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. Should this reaction occur, your health care provider is prepared to treat it.

Emergency treatment includes administration of epinephrine (adrenaline) and transfer by ambulance to the nearest emergency department. If symptoms develop after you leave the clinic, call **9-1-1** or the local emergency number.

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

### Who should not get the shingles vaccine?

If you are getting Shingrix<sup>®</sup>, speak with your health care provider if you have had a life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of the vaccine or to any part of the vaccine.

If you are getting Zostavax<sup>®</sup> II, speak with a health care provider if you:

- Have had a life-threatening reaction to any part of the vaccine including gelatin or neomycin
- Have an immune system weakened by disease or medical treatment
- Have active, untreated tuberculosis
- Are pregnant or planning to become pregnant. Women should avoid becoming pregnant for 3 months after getting Zostavax<sup>®</sup> II

There is no need to delay getting immunized because of a cold or other mild illness. However, if you have concerns, speak with your health care provider.

### 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 and 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 the chickenpox vaccine, see [HealthLinkBC File #44a Facts About Chickenpox](#) and [HealthLinkBC File #44b Chickenpox \(Varicella\) Vaccine](#).

For more information on immunizations, visit ImmunizeBC at <https://immunizebc.ca/>.



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BC Centre for Disease Control  
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