

Shingles vaccine

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

What is the shingles vaccine?

The shingles vaccine, Shingrix®, protects against shingles. Shingles is caused by the varicella zoster virus, which also causes chickenpox. Shingrix® is not a live virus vaccine and cannot give you shingles or chickenpox. The vaccine is approved by Health Canada.

Who should get the shingles vaccine?

Shingrix® is recommended for adults 50 years of age and older. This includes if you:

- Have had shingles
- Received a live virus shingles vaccine. You should wait at least 1 year before getting Shingrix® if you received a live virus shingles vaccine. The live virus shingles vaccines are no longer available in Canada
- Are not sure if you had chickenpox (varicella) infection in the past

People 18 years of age and older with a weakened immune system can also get the vaccine.

How can I get the shingles vaccine?

You can buy the shingles vaccine at most pharmacies and travel clinics. The vaccine is given as a series of 2 doses, 2 to 6 months apart, and costs about \$160 per dose. Some health insurance plans may cover the cost of the vaccine. Check with your provider.

What are the benefits of the shingles vaccine?

The shingles vaccine is the best way to protect you from getting shingles. The vaccine prevents

more than 90% of cases of shingles in adults 50 years and older. In adults 18 years and older with a weakened immune system, the vaccine prevents about 70%-90% of cases of shingles.

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

What are the possible reactions after the vaccine?

The shingles vaccine is very safe. Common reactions to the vaccine include soreness, redness and swelling where the vaccine was given. Other reactions include headache, fever, muscle soreness, fatigue, shivering, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and stomach pain.

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

Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) is a rare condition that can result in weakness and paralysis of the body's muscles. GBS may occur in about 3 in 1 million people who get the shingles vaccine.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine. There is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This happens in less than 1 in a million people who get the vaccine. Symptoms may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this reaction occurs, 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.

Always report serious or unexpected reactions to your health care provider.

Who should not get the shingles vaccine?

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
- Have shingles
- Are pregnant or breastfeeding
- Have a history of Guillain-Barré syndrome

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 who are unimmunized will get shingles in their lifetime.

Shingles is more common in people over 50 years of age and in those with weakened immune systems.

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](#).

