

## 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 protects against herpes zoster, more commonly referred to as shingles. Shingles are caused by the varicella zoster virus, which also causes chickenpox. The vaccine contains a weakened form of the virus that does not cause disease. 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 most travel clinics and pharmacies for 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 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 the 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 vaccine was given. Headache may also occur.

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.

\*Ibuprofen should not be given to children under 6 months of age without first speaking to your health care provider.

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, 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?

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 planning to become pregnant. Women should avoid becoming pregnant for 1 month after getting the shingles vaccine.

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.

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 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 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 [www.immunizebc.ca](http://www.immunizebc.ca).



ImmunizeBC



BC Centre for Disease Control  
An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority