

Shingles / Herpes Zoster Vaccine (Zostavax®) Fact Sheet

The shingles / herpes zoster vaccine, Zostavax®, helps to protect adults from shingles infections.

What is shingles / herpes zoster?

- Shingles, also known as herpes zoster, is caused by the same virus as chickenpox. After chickenpox blisters heal, the herpes zoster virus stays, hiding in the body's nerve cells.
- The virus may be inactive for many years, but for unknown reasons, it can become active again and cause shingles. It can happen to anyone who has had chickenpox, but the risk increases as you get older, especially if you are over 50 years of age.
- Shingles causes a painful, blister-like rash that usually appears on one side of the body or face. Up to 4 days before the rash appears, there is often pain, itching or tingling at the site.
- The blisters scab over in 3 to 5 days and can last for 2 to 4 weeks. You might also have a fever, chills, headache and upset stomach.
- In addition to the pain from the rash, the underlying nerve pain caused by shingles has been described as burning, throbbing and/or stabbing. It can last for months or years.
- People with shingles may have other complications, including scarring, bacterial skin infections, weakness, muscle paralysis and loss of hearing and / or vision.

Who should get the shingles vaccine?

- The live shingles vaccine Zostavax® is recommended for healthy individuals 60 years of age and older, but it is *approved* for healthy individuals 50 years of age and older.
- You should get the vaccine even if you don't remember whether or not you have had chickenpox. There is no need to check with a blood test.
- If you have had a case of shingles in the past, you may receive the vaccine, but you should wait at least a year after you have had shingles.
- You may receive the vaccine even if you are on a low dose of immunosuppressive therapy, e.g. less than 20 mg of prednisone a day or using a cortisone cream, inhaler or receiving injections.
- Adults on long-term ASA therapy can be vaccinated for shingles.

Publicly Funded:

- As of September 15, 2016, the shingles vaccine is **free** in Ontario if you are eligible and between 65 and 70 years of age (from the 65th birthday to the day prior to the 71st birthday).

What are the common side effects of the shingles vaccine?

- Some people may feel sore and swollen for a few days where the needle was given and may even develop a chickenpox-like rash at the site.
- **If a rash appears, please inform Public Health at 613-966-5500.**
- Some people may have headaches, fever and feel tired for a day or two.
- Tylenol® or ibuprofen may be taken afterwards, as directed, to reduce discomfort or fever.

Who should not get the shingles vaccine?

- Anyone who has had a serious allergic reaction to this vaccine in the past, or to any component of the vaccine:
 - Zostavax® - varicella zoster virus, sucrose, hydrolyzed gelatin, urea, sodium chloride, monosodium L-glutamate monohydrate, sodium phosphate, potassium phosphate, potassium chloride, neomycin, bovine calf serum, MRC-5 cells. Does not contain latex.

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Who should not get the shingles vaccine?

- Anyone who
 - has received a live vaccine in the last month or chickenpox vaccine in the last 3 months
 - is pregnant or could be pregnant
 - has an active case of shingles- wait at least one year to have the vaccine.
 - has had herpes zoster ophthalmicus (affecting the eye) that might still be active. You should check with your ophthalmologist before having the vaccine since there have been some cases where shingles of the eye comes back again after vaccination.
- Anyone on high dose corticosteroids, chemotherapy or medication that lowers the body's ability to fight infections.
- Anyone with
 - post-organ or hematopoietic stem cell transplant
 - blood disorders or cancers affecting the bone marrow, blood or lymph system
 - active untreated tuberculosis
 - human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)
- Anyone with a high fever or moderate to severe illness should wait until they feel well.

What else do I need to know?

- You can still develop shingles even if you have been vaccinated, but the vaccine can help to reduce the intensity and length of time your nerve pain will last.
- You cannot catch shingles from someone with chickenpox.
- You can catch the chickenpox from someone with shingles, but it is rare, and only if you touch the sores or a soiled article of clothing or tissue that has had contact with the sores.
- If you develop a rash after having the vaccine, and you have household contact with an infant, pregnant woman or an individual with a weak immune system, cover up the sores until they scab over, avoid direct contact with your family members, and make sure they do not touch any article that has touched the sores, e.g. tissues or clothing.
- Shingles vaccine may be given at the same time as pneumococcal vaccine (different arm).
- After the shingles vaccine, you should avoid becoming pregnant for at least 3 months.
- You may be able to claim Zostavax® if you have a drug plan.

When should I seek medical help after immunization?

- If you have any unusual side effects after immunization, seek medical attention and notify us.
- Call 911 or go to Emergency at a hospital right away if you have any of the following after immunization:
 - swelling of the face and neck
 - problems breathing
 - hives and itchy, reddened skin

Your Record of Protection

After you receive any immunization, make sure your health care provider updates your personal immunization record. Keep it in a safe place. Please inform us of any immunizations not received from public health.

Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Immunization Program at 613-966-5500
Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711.

We are committed to providing accessible publications, programs and services to all. For assistance, please call 613-966-5500; TTY: 711; or email accessibility@hpeph.ca. For more information, visit www.hpepublichealth.ca.