

What is Shingles?

Shingles or Herpes Zoster is caused by varicella zoster virus (VZV), which causes chickenpox. After a person has chickenpox, they remain infected for life and the virus stays in the nerve cells. Anyone who has had chickenpox can get shingles. Older adults and people with weakened immune system are more likely to get shingles. A person's immune system can become weaker from aging, medications, medical conditions, pregnancy, or stress. When this happens, VZV can wake up in the nerve cells and cause the symptoms of shingles again. Shingles starts with an itchy, tingling feeling followed by a painful rash with blisters. The rash is usually located on only one side of the body. When the rash goes away, some people can continue to have pain in the same area. This is called post-herpetic neuralgia. People who have a severely compromised immune system can develop a severe widespread form of shingles called disseminated herpes zoster where the painful rash develops on multiple regions of the body.

How is the shingles virus spread?

Since shingles is caused by the same virus that causes chickenpox, it is usually spread when a person who has never had chickenpox or has never been vaccinated against chickenpox, is in close physical contact with the rash or fluid from the rash of someone who is infected with shingles. Rarely, a person who is not immune to chickenpox can be infected when they breathe in the virus particles in the air when exposed to someone with disseminated herpes zoster.

When a person with shingles infects another person, that person will get chickenpox not shingles. The spread of VZV, the chickenpox virus, can be prevented by making sure you are vaccinated against chickenpox. A person with shingles can also avoid infecting others by covering their rash with clothing or a dressing, avoiding touching or scratching the rash, and washing their hands often. Their caregivers should also wash their hands often particularly after touching the rash of someone who is infected with shingles. Once the shingles rash develops crusts, the person is not contagious.

When should an individual receive protection from shingles with vaccination?

On September 1, 2025, the publicly funded program will be expanded to include all individuals 50 years of age and older as well as those 18-49 years of age with [immunocompromising conditions](#).

How many doses of Shingrix are needed for protection?

Two doses of Shingrix should be given 2 to 6 months apart.

Is Shingrix safe?

All vaccines recommended by the Public Health Agency of Canada and the Provincial Department of Health and Community Services are considered safe and effective for protection against disease.

Should an individual get the Shingrix vaccine if they have had chickenpox?

All individuals eligible for Shingrix should get the vaccine regardless of their history of chickenpox or VZV vaccination. There is no known safety risk associated with immunization of healthy individuals who are not immune to VZV. However, if an individual is known to be not immune to VZV, they should receive the VZV vaccine rather than the shingles vaccine.

Should an individual receive Shingrix if they have had shingles in the past?

Eligible individuals who have a history of shingles should be offered Shingrix. Immunization may be considered at least one year after the last episode of shingles. If an individual currently has shingles, they should wait at least until the rash develops crusts before getting the shingles vaccine.

What if an individual has received Zostavax (the live herpes zoster vaccine), which was discontinued in 2023?

Eligible individuals who received Zostavax should be offered Shingrix and consider re-immunization with Shingrix at least one year after they received Zostavax.

What if an individual has received one shot of Shingrix more than 6 months ago?

Ideally, two doses of shingles vaccine should be administered 6 months apart but can be administered 2-6 months apart. Two doses of vaccine administered 12 months apart can also be considered a completion of the series. If more than 12 months have passed since the last shingles vaccine, the shingles vaccine series should be restarted to acquire long-term immunity.

What are the vaccine's common side effects?

Common side effects after getting the Shingrix vaccine are pain at the injection site, fatigue, headache, and muscle or joint pain. Individuals that experience symptoms after vaccination should consult with their primary care provider to discuss symptom relief.

Who should NOT get the shingles vaccine?

Individuals with anaphylactic allergies to [components of the vaccine](#) or who have had a reaction to a vaccine should talk to their health care provider for advice before getting Shingrix.