

Shingles (Herpes Zoster) Vaccine



Region of Waterloo
PUBLIC HEALTH AND
EMERGENCY SERVICES

What is Shingles?

Shingles is a skin infection caused by a recurrence of chickenpox virus (varicella-zoster virus). Only people who have had chickenpox or received the chickenpox vaccine can get shingles (those who have been immunized for chickenpox are four to twelve times less likely to get shingles).

The chickenpox virus 'sleeps' in the body and can cause shingles later in life. Shingles increases in severity with age and is most common in individuals over 50 years of age, and those with weakened immune systems.

Shingles occurs when the chickenpox virus reactivates in the nerve cells. You cannot get shingles from someone who has shingles. However, someone who has never had chickenpox can get chickenpox disease if you are exposed to shingles.

The infectious period lasts about seven to ten days, from the onset of the rash until all the scabs have crusted. Unlike chickenpox, shingles is not spread by coughing. The virus is spread through contact with the skin lesions (rash).

Symptoms include: A painful rash that develops on one side of the face or body. Pain, itching, or tingling in the area where the rash will develop anywhere from one to five days before the rash appears. Often, the rash occurs in a single strip around one side of the body or on one side of the face. Nerve pain may last for weeks to months after the rash disappears.

Treatment with antiviral medication helps reduce the severity and duration of symptoms. It is most effective if taken within three days of the appearance of the rash.

Who should get the vaccine?

Shingles vaccine is licensed for individuals 50 years of age and older.

Shingles (Herpes Zoster) Vaccine:

Shingles vaccines significantly reduce the incidence of shingles and nerve pain that can last for weeks to months, as well as the duration and severity of infection.

Two products are currently available:

Shingrix (non-live vaccine), is not publicly funded. Two doses given two to six months apart are required. Immune response is the same across all adults 50 years and older. Protection four years post immunization remains consistent and above 90 per cent in all age groups. Ostavax (live vaccine), is publicly funded for adults 65-70 years old. One dose is required. Immune response is better for those 50-59 years of age and decreases with age. Zostavax reduces the risk of developing shingles by 51 per cent and nerve pain by 67 per cent. While protection has been shown to last up to three years, significant waning has been observed one-year post immunization, particularly in older age groups.

Who should not get the vaccine?

- anyone with a high fever or serious infection worse than a cold
- anyone with an allergy to a component of the vaccine (Zostavax: neomycin and porcine gelatin)
- anyone with a reaction to a previous dose of vaccine

For Zostavax:

- anyone who is immunocompromised
- anyone with active untreated tuberculosis
- anyone who is pregnant - pregnancy should be avoided for three months after immunization

Side effects:

Reactions tend to be mild and last for only a few days after getting the needle. Some people get soreness, swelling or redness where the needle was given. Other side effects such as headache, fever, and fatigue may occur.

There is an increased chance of side effects listed above with Shingrix vaccine.

When should I seek medical attention?

Severe reactions are rare. If you develop hives, swelling of the face and mouth, trouble breathing, serious drowsiness or other serious problems seek medical attention immediately.

Your record of protection

After any immunization, ensure your personal immunization record or Yellow Card is updated. Keep it in a safe place!

Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call Public Health at 519-575-4400.

Alternate formats of this document are available upon request.

Region of Waterloo Public Health and Emergency Services

Infectious Disease, Sexual Health and Harm Reduction

www.regionofwaterloo.ca/ph

519-575-4400 TTY 519-575-4608 Fax 519-883-2226