Important Information about **Shingles** and the Herpes Zoster Vaccine

PLEASE READ THIS CAREFULLY

What is shingles?

- Shingles, also known as herpes zoster (HZ), is an illness caused by the reactivation of varicella-zoster virus (chickenpox) from a previous infection. Shingles is not a new infection.
- The virus usually activates in the skin's nerves in one area of the body, causing a painful, blistering rash.
- In most cases, the rash stays on one side, not passing the middle of the body.
- Shingles occurs most often in older adults and people with weakened immune systems. However, shingles can happen at any time following a chickenpox infection.
- The most common issue people experience following a shingles infection is severe nerve pain in the area where the rash was. This pain can last for months or even years and is called post-herpetic neuralgia.
- In rare cases, the shingles virus can spread beyond a small, localized area and affect multiple parts of the body. It may cause a widespread rash or impact vital organs such as the lungs, brain, or liver. In some instances, it can also lead to complications like blindness or hearing loss.
- You cannot catch shingles from someone with shingles.
- You can however catch the chickenpox virus from someone with shingles if you have never had a chickenpox infection or immunization in the past.
- The chickenpox virus is passed through direct contact with fluid from shingles blisters that have not crusted over. Once the shingles rash has fully developed crusts, the infected person is no longer contagious.

What is the herpes zoster (shingles) vaccine?

- The herpes zoster vaccine contains tiny pieces of the varicella-zoster virus. These pieces are not active, cannot make you sick, and will help your immune system fight the virus if you are exposed to it in the future.
- The vaccine is given by injection.
- Two doses of the vaccine are required for full protection.

Who should receive the herpes zoster (shingles) vaccine?

- The Nova Scotia Routine Immunization Schedule for Children, Youth & Adults recommends the routine immunization of seniors 65 years of age and older.
- Adults younger than 65 years of age can speak with their primary health care provider or pharmacist about herpes zoster vaccine and can pay for the vaccine themselves.
- Herpes zoster vaccine should be considered for individuals regardless of whether they have had a chickenpox infection or vaccine in the past. Anyone eligible to receive this vaccine would have likely had some form of exposure to chickenpox in their lifetime.

CAUTION

Who should NOT receive the herpes zoster (shingles) vaccine?

- People who have had a serious allergic reaction to a previous dose, or any component, of the herpes zoster vaccine.
- People who are sick or have a fever (temperature of 38.5°C/101.3°F or greater).

Please read other side.

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What to Expect Following Immunization with **Herpes Zoster (Shingles) Vaccine**

VACCINE INFORMATION

People should stay in the clinic for at least 15 minutes after receiving any type of immunization to monitor possible reaction. As with any vaccine there is a slight possibility that a more serious reaction could occur.

What are the possible side effects of the herpes zoster (shingles) vaccine?

- As with all vaccines, the most common symptoms experienced following herpes zoster immunization are soreness, swelling, and redness at the injection site. Some people may also have a headache, fever, and nausea.

Over-the-counter pain relievers such as ibuprofen (e.g., Advil) and acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol) can be used to manage symptoms following vaccination, including fever. Some people should not take these medications. Talk to your health care provider or pharmacist if you have questions, or are unsure if you should take these.

Call your health care provider if:

- You have a fever of 38.5°C (101.3°F) or greater, or the fever lasts longer than 24 hours.
- Your fever doesn't come down after acetaminophen or ibuprofen is taken.
- You are ill with other symptoms.

Questions?

If you have any questions about shingles or the herpes zoster vaccine, please call your local Public Health office (see list of offices here: *www.nshealth.ca/public-health-offices*), or your health care provider.

For more information on immunization, please visit the websites of

- Nova Scotia Health, Public Health at *https://www.nshealth.ca/public-health/immunizations*
- Immunize Canada at *immunize.ca*
- the Public Health Agency of Canada at *https://health.canada.ca/index-phac-aspc.php*
- 811 at *https://811.novascotia.ca/*

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