



Important Information About Shingles and the Herpes Zoster Vaccine



What is shingles?

- Shingles, also known as herpes zoster, 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 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 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 prevent you from developing shingles.
- The vaccine is given by injection.
- Two doses of the vaccine are required for full protection.



Who should receive the herpes zoster vaccine?

- The Nova Scotia Routine Immunization Schedules 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 healthcare 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.



Who should NOT receive the herpes zoster 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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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 vaccine?

As with any other vaccine, the most common side effects are soreness, redness or swelling at the injection site. Some people may also have a headache, fever and nausea.

As fever may occur, make sure you have acetaminophen or ibuprofen at home. Follow the instructions that come with the product. Talk to your healthcare provider before using either of these medications as they are not recommended for people with certain medical conditions.

Call your healthcare provider if:

- A fever lasts longer than 24 hours.
- A fever is 38.5°C (101.3°F) or higher.
- A fever doesn't come down after acetaminophen or ibuprofen are taken.
- Other illness or symptoms occur.



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) or your healthcare provider.

For more information on immunization, please visit the following websites:

Nova Scotia Health Public Health
www.nshealth.ca/immunizations

Immunize Canada
immunize.ca

Public Health Agency of Canada
www.canada.ca/public-health

811
811.novascotia.ca