

Shingles Vaccine

Vaccines have saved more lives compared to any other medical intervention. Vaccines help the immune system recognize and fight bacteria and viruses that cause serious diseases.

What is shingles?

- Shingles is a painful skin rash with blisters and is most common in older adults and people who have weakened immune systems.
- Shingles symptoms happen in stages:
 - Initially, you may have a headache, fever and flu-like symptoms.
 - Next, you feel tingling, sensitivity to touch or pain in an area on one side of your face or body.
 - Soon, a red rash develops in a band or stripe on that one side of the face or body.
 - Finally, the rash then turns into painful fluid-filled blisters that break open and crust over.
- The pain, burning, or tingling associated with shingles usually lessens as the rash heals. However, shingles can cause severe nerve pain in some people, which can last for months or even years. This long-term nerve pain is called post-herpetic neuralgia.
- In severe cases, shingles can also lead to complications such as vision loss if the rash spreads to the eyes, nerve damage and infection, or skin infections/scarring.
- It is possible to get shingles more than once.

What causes shingles?

- Shingles is caused by the same virus that causes chickenpox.
- Upon recovery from chickenpox, the virus becomes inactive and stays in your nerve roots (nerves that immediately branch off from your spinal cord).
- Aging, stress, diseases, medicines or medical treatments may reactivate the virus to cause shingles.

Can shingles spread to others?

- Shingles cannot be spread from person to person.
- However, it is possible for individuals who have never had chickenpox to develop chickenpox after they had direct contact with the chickenpox virus in the fluid of the shingles blisters.
- In rare cases when shingles covers a large area of the body, the virus can spread to others through the air when the infected person coughs or sneezes, or through close contact with infected droplets in the air.

Can shingles be treated?

- **See a doctor or nurse practitioner right away if you have symptoms of shingles, especially near your eye or nose as treatment can prevent lasting eye damage.**
- By taking antiviral medicine right away as you start developing symptoms, your rash heals quicker, is less painful, and other problems caused by shingles may be prevented.
- Prescription pain medicine can help if your shingles is very painful.

How can shingles be prevented?

- Getting the shingles vaccine is the safest and the most effective way to protect yourself from shingles.

Which adults may get this vaccine for free?

- Solid organ transplant candidates and recipients.
- Hematopoietic stem cell transplant recipients.

Who should not get this vaccine?

- People who had a serious or life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of a shingles vaccine, or any components of this vaccine.
- Persons who have a serious acute illness **including active shingles disease**, with or without a fever should delay immunizations.

What are common reactions to this vaccine?

- **Vaccines are very safe and effective. It is much safer to get this vaccine than to get shingles.**
- Pain, redness, swelling, tenderness where the injection was given.
- Muscle aches, fatigue, headache, shivering, fever, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, rash, hives and swelling elsewhere on the body.
- These mild reactions generally last 1 to 2 days.
- Only treat a fever (at least 6 to 8 hours after immunization) **if** you are uncomfortable, unable to take fluids and not sleeping.
- Rare cases of Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) have been reported after immunization but the vaccine has not been found to directly have caused these cases.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips.

This reaction can be treated and occurs in less than one in one million people who get the vaccine. **If this happens after you leave the clinic, get medical attention or call 911 right away.**

Who should you report reactions to?

- Report any adverse or unexpected reactions to your local public health nurse, your doctor, nurse practitioner or call 811 as soon as possible.

Talk to a public health nurse:

- If you have questions or concerns about your reaction to an immunization.
- If you had to go to a doctor, a hospital or to a health centre with a symptom that might be related to immunization.

What does this vaccine contain?

- A dose of SHINGRIX™ contains 50 mcg Varicella Zoster Virus (VZV) glycoprotein E (gE).
- Non-medicinal ingredients: Cholesterol, dioleoyl phosphatidylcholine, dipotassium phosphate, disodium phosphate anhydrous, polysorbate 80, potassium dihydrogen phosphate, Quillaja saponaria Molina, fraction 21 (QS-21), 3-O-desacyl-4'-monophosphoryl lipid A (MPL), sodium chloride, sodium dihydrogen phosphate dihydrate, sucrose, water for injection

Provincial immunization fact sheets are available at www.saskatchewan.ca/immunize.

For more information, contact your local public health office, your physician, nurse practitioner, HealthLine online or by calling 811.

References: [Canadian Immunization Guide](#).