

Shingles Vaccine (Zostavax[®] II)

Information for Patients

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns you have, and before you make any changes to your diet, lifestyle or treatment.

Beginning September 15, 2016, Ontario will offer the shingles vaccine free of charge to seniors between the ages of 65 and 70 as part of its publicly funded immunization program.

What is shingles?

Shingles, also known as herpes zoster, is an infection that can be very serious. The virus causes a painful skin rash with blisters on one side of the body, often in a strip. It can cause complications like loss of vision and debilitating nerve pain. Shingles is caused by the reactivation of the varicella zoster virus, the same virus that causes chickenpox.

The most common complication is prolonged and severe pain where the shingles rash was. This is known as post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN) and there is no treatment or cure for it. As individuals get older, they are more likely to develop PHN and the pain is likely to be more severe.

Shingles may also lead to serious complications involving the eye. Very rarely, shingles can lead to pneumonia, hearing problems, blindness, brain inflammation (encephalitis) or death.

Shingles cannot be passed from one person to another. For example, you cannot get shingles from being exposed to someone with shingles, nor can you get shingles if someone who has it coughs or sneezes on you. However, the virus that causes shingles can be spread from a person with shingles rash in the blister phase to another person who has never had chickenpox. The virus is spread through direct contact with the fluid in the blisters. In such cases, the person exposed to the virus might develop chickenpox, but they would not develop shingles. Once the rash has developed crusts, the infected person is no longer contagious.

Who is at risk of getting shingles?

The risk of shingles increases as individuals get older. In fact, about one in three Canadians will develop shingles in their lifetime and two out of three cases occur in individuals over 50 years of age. The severity of shingles and its complications increase with age. Individuals with

weakened immune system are also at greater risk of getting shingles. People who develop shingles usually only have one episode in their lifetime, but it is possible to have recurring episodes.

The shingles vaccine can reduce your risk of getting shingles and the long-term pain it can cause.

Who is eligible to receive the publicly funded vaccine?

Seniors who are 65 to 70 years of age are eligible to receive the publicly funded shingles vaccine.

The shingles vaccine is given in one dose. For more information about the shingles immunization program, please contact your primary care provider.

Until December 31, 2016, individuals born in 1945 (i.e., those who are already 71 or will be turning 71 in 2016), are also eligible to receive the publicly funded shingles vaccine.

Where can I get the vaccine?

The publicly funded vaccine will be available to eligible individuals through their primary care provider.

Individuals, who are not eligible for the publicly funded shingles vaccine, can purchase the vaccine privately. Ask your health care provider for a prescription.

Who should not receive the shingles vaccine?

Some people should not get the shingles vaccine:

- Individuals with weakened immune systems due to: acute and chronic leukemias; lymphoma; other

conditions affecting the bone marrow or lymphatic system; or immunosuppression due to HIV/AIDS

- Individuals on immunosuppressive therapy (including high-dose corticosteroids)
- Individuals with a history of severe reaction after previous administration of the vaccine
- Individuals with proven hypersensitivity to any component of the vaccine or its container, including gelatin or neomycin
- Individuals with active untreated tuberculosis
- Individuals who are pregnant

You should not get the vaccine if you currently have shingles. If you recently had shingles, you should wait at least one year before receiving the vaccine.

Is the shingles vaccine safe and effective?

The shingles vaccine is safe and effective for the prevention of shingles and its complications. Studies have shown that the vaccine reduced the risk of shingles by 51.3 percent and the risk of post-herpetic neuralgia (the most frequent complication of shingles) by 66.5 percent. The vaccine's effectiveness decreases considerably after 70 years of age.

A vaccine, like any medicine, can cause side effects. Common side effects from the shingles vaccine are mild and can include pain, swelling or redness at the injection site. Other side effects may include a hard lump, itching, warmth, and bruising at the injection site, as well as headache and pain in an arm or leg. Severe reactions are rare.

When should I call my health care provider?

Call your health care provider or go to the nearest emergency department if any of the following reactions develop within three days of receiving the vaccine:

- hives
- swelling of the face or mouth
- trouble breathing
- very pale colour and serious drowsiness

- high fever (over 40°C)
- convulsions or seizures
- other serious symptoms (e.g., “pins and needles” or numbness).

Where can I get more information?

For more information on the publicly funded shingles vaccine, or any vaccine within Ontario’s publicly funded immunization program, please visit: [Ontario.ca/vaccines](https://www.ontario.ca/vaccines). You may also contact your health care provider or local public health unit.