

# Zoster (Shingles) Vaccine

## Addressing Common Questions about Shingles Vaccination for Adults

### What disease does this vaccine protect against?

The zoster vaccine protects against shingles, which is caused by the varicella zoster virus, the same virus that causes chickenpox. The virus from chickenpox stays in your body and can cause shingles many years after chickenpox infection occurs.

### How common is this disease?

One out of three people in the United States will get shingles in their lifetime, and at least 1 million people per year have it. Shingles is far more common in people 60 years of age and older than in younger people. Shingles is also more common in people whose immune systems are weakened because of a disease such as cancer, or drugs such as steroids or chemotherapy.

### How is this disease spread?

You can't catch shingles from another person with shingles. After a person recovers from chickenpox, the varicella zoster virus stays dormant (inactive) in the body. For reasons that are not fully known, the virus can reactivate years later, causing shingles. However, a person who has never had chickenpox (or chickenpox vaccine) could get chickenpox from someone with shingles.

### Who is at risk for this disease?

Anyone who has had chickenpox may develop shingles. Studies show that more than 99% of Americans aged 40 and older have had chickenpox, even if they do not remember getting the disease. Although rare, even children can get shingles. However, the risk of disease greatly increases as a person gets older. About half of all cases occur among adults 60 years and older.

People who have medical conditions that keep their immune systems from working properly, such as certain cancers, including leukemia and lymphoma, and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and people who receive drugs that suppress the immune system, such as steroids and drugs given after organ transplantation, are also at greater risk of getting shingles.

### What could happen if I get this disease?

Shingles is a very painful skin rash that forms blisters.

- A shingles rash usually appears on one side of the face or body and lasts from 2 to 4 weeks.
- For some people, pain can last for months or even years after a shingles rash goes away. This pain is called postherpetic neuralgia or PHN. It is the most common complication of shingles.
- Other symptoms of shingles can include fever, headache, chills, and upset stomach.
- Very rarely, a shingles infection can lead to pneumonia, hearing problems, blindness, brain inflammation (encephalitis), or death.

For more information on this and other vaccines for adults, visit [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults).

**DON'T WAIT.  
VACCINATE!**



U.S. Department of  
Health and Human Services  
Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention

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## Who should get this vaccine? When and how often is this vaccine needed?

A single dose of shingles vaccine is recommended for adults 60 years or older.

## Who should not get this vaccine?

Some people should not get shingles vaccine, including those who:

- Have had a life-threatening allergic reaction to gelatin, the antibiotic neomycin, or any other component of shingles vaccine
- Have a weakened immune system
- Are pregnant

Someone with a minor acute illness, such as a cold, may be vaccinated. But anyone with a moderate or severe acute illness, such as the flu, should usually wait until they recover before getting the vaccine. This includes anyone with a temperature of 101.3°F or higher.

## How well does the vaccine work?

In clinical trials, the vaccine reduced the risk of shingles by about 50% and the likelihood of lingering nerve pain (post-herpetic neuralgia) by about 65%. The amount of protection you receive from shingles vaccine depends on personal factors, such as your age. Getting vaccinated gives you the best protection possible against this disease.

## How safe is this vaccine?

Shingles vaccine is very safe. It went through years of testing before being licensed by the FDA in 2006 and continues to be monitored for safety by the FDA and CDC.

### Is it safe to get if I have certain health conditions or am taking prescription meds?

The vaccine is safe for you unless you are pregnant, have a weakened immune system, or have allergies to certain components of the vaccine. It is safe for people taking most prescription medications to get this vaccine, but ask your doctor if you have any questions.

## What are the potential side effects of this vaccine?

In most cases, shingles vaccine causes no serious side effects. Some people experience mild reactions that last up to a few days, such as redness, soreness, swelling, or itching where the shot was given, or headache.

## Where can I get the vaccine?

Shingles vaccine may be available at private doctor offices, pharmacies, public or travel health clinics, or other community locations. Check with your doctor or pharmacist or use the [Adult Vaccine Finder \(vaccine.healthmap.org\)](http://vaccine.healthmap.org) to help find places that provide the shingles vaccine near you.

## How much does the vaccine cost?

Most private health insurance covers recommended adult vaccines, including shingles vaccine. All Medicare Part D plans cover the shingles vaccine. Depending on your plan, you may need to pay a portion of the total cost for the shingles vaccine. There may be a copay for the vaccine, or you may need to pay in full then get reimbursed for a certain amount. Check with your insurance provider for details on whether there is any cost to you and for a list of in-network vaccine providers.