

Shingles (Herpes Zoster) Vaccine

What is shingles?

Shingles is an illness that causes a painful skin rash. It is also called **herpes zoster**. The rash usually shows up as blisters on **one side of the body or face**. Shingles can cause serious health problems. The most common problem is **long-lasting nerve pain**. This pain is called **postherpetic neuralgia (PHN)**.

Nerve pain from shingles:

- Can last for months or years
- Can be severe
- Can make it hard to sleep, walk, or do daily activities

Other problems shingles can cause:

- Scarring of the skin
- Skin infections
- Muscle weakness or paralysis (including face paralysis)
- Hearing loss
- Vision problems, including blindness

Even light touch, clothing, or a breeze can cause severe pain for some people.

What causes shingles?

Shingles is caused by the **same virus that causes chickenpox**. After you have chickenpox, the virus stays in your body. It can become active again later in life and cause shingles.

Shingles is more likely if:

- You are older
- You have a weak immune system
- You are sick or getting certain medical treatments

How does shingles spread?

Shingles **does not spread from person to person**.

However:

- Someone with shingles can pass the virus to a person who never had chickenpox
- That person would get **chickenpox**, not shingles

What are the symptoms of shingles?

Symptoms often happen in stages.

Early symptoms may include:

- Headache
- Fever or flu-like feelings
- Sensitivity to light

Later symptoms include:

- Tingling, itching, or pain in one area of the body
- A rash that turns into blisters

The pain can be very strong and affect daily life.

Who should get the Herpes Zoster vaccine?

The **Herpes Zoster vaccine** helps prevent shingles.

It is recommended for:

- Adults **50 years and older**
- Adults **18 years and older with a weak immune system**

Your immune system may be weaker if you have:

- Cancer, HIV/AIDS, or autoimmune diseases
- Chemotherapy or radiation treatment
- Medicines that weaken the immune system

Talk to a health care provider if you are not sure.

What is in the Herpes Zoster vaccine?

The vaccine contains a **protein from the shingles virus**. It **cannot cause shingles**. It also contains an ingredient (called an adjuvant) that helps your body build strong protection.

What are the common side effects?

Most side effects are mild and go away on their own.

Common side effects include:

- Pain, redness, or swelling where the needle went in
- Headache
- Muscle pain
- Feeling tired
- Fever or chills
- Upset stomach, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea

Serious allergic reactions are **very rare**. Signs of a serious reaction include:

- Hives or rash
- Swelling of the face, lips, tongue, or throat
- Trouble breathing or swallowing

These usually happen within **15 minutes** of vaccination.

You will be asked to stay for 15 minutes after your shot so help is nearby if needed.

Questions?

Talk to your health care provider if you have questions about shingles or the Herpes Zoster vaccine.