

Vaccines & Immunizations

Vaccines and Preventable Diseases:

Shingles Vaccination: What You Need to Know

Information for the General Public

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The vaccine for shingles (Zostavax®) is recommended for use in people 60 years old and older to prevent shingles. The older a person is, the more severe the effects of shingles typically are, so all adults 60 years old or older should get the shingles vaccine.

The shingles vaccine is specifically designed to protect people against shingles and will not protect people against other forms of herpes, such as genital herpes. The shingles vaccine is not recommended to treat active shingles or post-herpetic neuralgia (pain after the rash is gone) once it develops.

Disease Protection

In a clinical trial involving thousands of adults 60 years old or older, Zostavax reduced the risk of shingles by about half (51%) and the risk of post-herpetic neuralgia by 67%. While the vaccine was most effective in people 60-69 years old it also provided some protection for older groups.

Research suggests that the shingles vaccine is effective for at least six years, but may last much longer. Ongoing studies are being conducted to determine exactly how long the vaccine protects against shingles.

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Who Should Get the Vaccine

CDC recommends Zostavax for use in people 60 years old and older to prevent shingles. This is a one-time vaccination. There is no maximum age for getting the shingles vaccine.

Anyone 60 years of age or older should get the shingles vaccine, regardless of whether they recall having had chickenpox or not. Studies show that more than 99% of Americans ages 40 and older have had chickenpox, even if they don't remember getting the disease.

Shingles vaccine is available in pharmacies and doctor's offices. Talk with your healthcare professional if you have questions about shingles vaccine.

At this time, CDC does not have a recommendation for routine use of shingles vaccine in persons 50 through 59 years old. However, the vaccine is approved by FDA for people in this age group.

Even if you have had shingles, you can still receive the shingles vaccine to help prevent future occurrences of the disease. There is no specific time that you must wait after having shingles before receiving the shingles vaccine. The decision on when to get vaccinated should be made with your health care provider. Generally, a person should make sure that the shingles rash has disappeared before getting vaccinated.

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Who Should NOT Get the Vaccine

Some people should NOT get shingles vaccine.

- A person who has ever had a life-threatening or severe allergic reaction to gelatin, the antibiotic neomycin, or any other component of shingles vaccine. Tell your doctor if you have any severe allergies.
- A person who has a weakened immune system because of
 - HIV/AIDS or another disease that affects the immune system,
 - treatment with drugs that affect the immune system, such as steroids,
 - cancer treatment such as radiation or chemotherapy,
 - a history of cancer affecting the bone marrow or lymphatic system, such as leukemia or lymphoma.
- Women who are or might be pregnant

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Possible Reactions to Vaccination

No serious problems have been identified with shingles vaccine.

The vaccine has been tested in about 20,000 people aged 60 years old and older. The most common side effects in people who got the vaccine were redness, soreness, swelling or itching at the shot site, and headache. CDC, working with the FDA, will continue to monitor the safety of the vaccine after it is in general use.

It is safe to be around infants and young children, pregnant women, or people with weakened immune systems after you get the shingles vaccine. There is no documentation of a person getting chickenpox from someone who has received the shingles vaccine (which contains varicella zoster virus).

Some people who get the shingles vaccine will develop a chickenpox-like rash near the place where they were vaccinated. As a precaution, this rash should be covered until it disappears.

The shingles vaccine does not contain thimerosal (a preservative containing mercury).

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Reimbursement for Vaccination

All Medicare Part D plans cover the shingles vaccine. The amount of cost-sharing (money you have to pay) for vaccination varies.

Medicare Part B does not cover the shingles vaccine. If you have private insurance or Medicaid, your plan may or may not cover the vaccine; contact your insurer to find out.


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Related Links

- [Shingles \(Herpes Zoster\) Vaccine Information Sheet \(../pubs/vis/default.htm#shingles\)](#)
- [Shingles \(Herpes zoster\) Vaccine Side-Effects \(../vac-gen/side-effects.htm#shingles\)](#)

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