

Herpes Zoster (Shingles) Vaccination

Herpes Zoster (Shingles) is caused by the varicella-zoster virus which is also responsible for chickenpox (varicella). Shingles is an infectious disease with painful, stripe-like rashes and blisters. Strengthening the immunity and getting vaccinated are effective in preventing Shingles or reducing its severity.

Cause of Herpes Zoster (Shingles)

- Previously infected by, and recovered from chickenpox (varicella)

Risk Factors

- Factors such as age, stress, patients of chronic illnesses such as diabetes, long-term users of immunosuppressive drugs such as oral-administered steroids, might trigger the virus latent in the nerve tissues to become active again

Clinical Features

- Onset: Symptoms similar to that of flu, such as headache, fatigue, fever and gastro-intestinal discomfort
- Within 1 to 3 days of onset: starting to feel pain at the spots, and a tingling sensation even without touching. Common affected locations are at the back and the waist. The virus will reach the skin surface en route the spinal nerves, and form vesicle blister
- The rash then develops into clusters of vesicles and disseminate to other sites, depending on the spread of the infected nerves. The vesicles can last from 1 to 14 days, with fluid-filled blisters breaking open and crusting over within 2 to 3 weeks
- Post-recovery: some patients will suffer from relatively serious complications, such as postherpetic neuralgia that lasts between a couple of months to years. Patients will experience unusually severe pain triggered by touch to the skin. Others might see pigmentation changes that could subside in months; in severe cases, some can see scarring on the skin.

Vaccination

Herpes Zoster (Shingles) Vaccine	
Applicability	Males and Females aged 50 or above
Method of administration	Subcutaneous injection, 1 dose
Contraindication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- A person who has ever had a life-threatening or severe allergic reaction to gelatin, the antibiotic (e.g. neomycin), or any component of the vaccine- A person who has a weakened immune system- A person that is on treatment with drugs that suppressed the immune system, such as steroids- Patients that are undergoing chemotherapy- Tuberculosis patients that have yet to undergo treatment- Women who are or plan to get pregnant. Women should not become pregnant until at least 3 months after getting zoster vaccine
Side effects	Side effects are mostly temporary and can include soreness, redness and swelling around the injection site or headache

Research has shown that getting vaccinated is effective in reducing the chance of getting shingles, and in the event of infection, can lower the severity and the likelihood of complications, as well as reducing the pain from potential postherpetic neuralgia. Even people who have had shingles previously can be vaccinated, as recurrence is possible when immunity is compromised. Since shingles is caused by varicella-zoster virus, which could also cause chickenpox, so recovered chickenpox patients are of highest risk. In case you are not sure of your chickenpox history, it is recommended that you still consider being vaccinated for shingles as a precaution.

Vaccines for Herpes Zoster (Shingles) and Pneumococcal Infection cannot be taken at the same time, otherwise effectiveness for protection Herpes Zoster (Shingles) will be compromised. However, Herpes Zoster (Shingles) vaccine can be taken with other live vaccines such as those for measles on the same day; otherwise another live vaccine will have to be taken 1 month after the Herpes Zoster (Shingles) vaccination.