

Nova Scotia Shingles Immunization Program

Information for Health Care Professionals

May 2025

What is shingles?

Shingles, also known as herpes zoster (HZ), is an illness caused by the reactivation of latent varicella zoster virus (VZV) from a previous chickenpox infection; it is not a new infection. Reactivation of the virus typically happens in skin nerves, usually in a single dermatome, causing a painful blistering rash that does not cross the midline of the body. The illness can be serious and severe in some people.

The most common complication of shingles is severe nerve pain in the area affected by the rash that can continue for months or even years, known as post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN). Shingles near the eye may also lead to serious complications, including herpes zoster ophthalmicus. Rarely, shingles can lead to other complications including pneumonia, hearing problems, blindness, brain inflammation (encephalitis), or death.

Can you get shingles from other people?

During a shingles episode, the ability of reactivated VZV to cause disease in another person depends on that individual's chickenpox vaccine and infection history. Shingles cannot spread to another person who has previously had chickenpox infection or been vaccinated against chickenpox. Susceptible individuals may develop chickenpox but would not develop shingles.

Unlike chickenpox, shingles is rarely spread through airborne transmission and is not typically passed to others by coughing or sneezing. The virus is most commonly passed through direct contact with skin lesions that have not crusted. Once the shingles rash has fully developed crusts, the infected person is no longer contagious.

Who is at risk of getting shingles?

Shingles can develop at any time following a chickenpox infection. It can occur in individuals of any age; however, the risk of shingles increases as individuals get older. About one in three Canadians will develop shingles in their lifetime.

The severity of shingles and its complications (e.g., PHN) increases with age. While individuals usually only have one episode in their lifetime, recurrence is possible. Shingrix® reduces the risk of getting shingles and its complications, including long-term pain associated with PHN.

What vaccines are available to protect against shingles?

Shingrix® is the only vaccine authorized for use in Canada. Zostavax® and Zostavax® II have been discontinued.

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 Shingrix® vaccine reduced the risk of shingles by 90% and the risk of post-herpetic neuralgia (the most frequent complication of shingles) by 88-91%.

Who is eligible to receive the publicly funded Shingrix®?

Starting in spring 2025, Nova Scotia is offering seniors 65 years of age and older the opportunity to receive publicly funded Shingrix® as a 2-dose series through the shingles immunization program.

Adults outside the eligibility criteria can speak with their primary health care provider about shingles immunization and purchasing the vaccine privately.

Can someone receive Shingrix® if they did not previously have chickenpox or if they received the chickenpox (VZV) vaccine?

For those without a known history of chickenpox or vaccination against VZV, Shingrix® is recommended to reduce the risk of shingles and its complications.

Can someone receive Shingrix® if they don't remember if they had chickenpox or if they have not received the chickenpox (VZV) vaccine?

Previous chickenpox infection or vaccination confirmation is not required before administering Shingrix®.

Can someone receive Shingrix® if they previously received Zostavax® or Zostavax® II?

Seniors 65 years of age and older who received Zostavax® or Zostavax® II vaccine are eligible for the publicly funded Shingrix® vaccine if it's been at least 12 months since receipt. Nova Scotians outside the eligibility criteria for publicly funded Shingrix® vaccine can speak with their primary health care provider about re-vaccination with Shingrix® and purchasing the vaccine privately.

Can someone receive Shingrix® if they previously received 1 dose of Shingrix®?

Seniors 65 years of age and older who received only 1 dose of Shingrix® should receive a second dose to complete the 2-dose series. It's recommended to receive the second dose 2-6 months after the first, though it can be given any time after the 6-month interval without restarting the series. In rare circumstances and at the clinician's discretion, the second dose may be given after a 1-month interval. See the [product monograph](#) for more information.

Can someone receive Shingrix® if they previously received 2 doses?

Seniors 65 years of age and older who already received 2 doses of Shingrix® are considered fully immunized and not eligible for additional doses. There is no current recommendation for booster doses in the general population. Individuals who are 65 years and older who undergo stem-cell transplantation may be considered for a second two-dose series based on clinical discretion and/or specialist consultation (e.g., infectious diseases or transplant specialists). Please refer to the [Canadian Immunization Guide](#) for more information.

Where will the publicly funded Shingrix® vaccine be available?

The publicly funded Shingrix® vaccine will be available to eligible individuals through their primary health care provider, community pharmacies, and licensed long term care facilities.

Who should not receive Shingrix®?

Shingrix® should not be given to individuals who have allergies to any of its ingredients. Those with severe acute illness should wait until the symptoms subside before being immunized.

Can someone who has had shingles receive Shingrix® if they are fully recovered?

While there is no required waiting period to be immunized with Shingrix® after getting shingles, waiting 1 year after infection is typically recommended. Health care providers can work with clients to create a personalized timeline based on their past medical history.

When should I report an adverse event?

Immunizers are required by law to report adverse events following immunization (AEFIs) to Public Health. AEFIs are any unfavorable or unintended sign, abnormal laboratory finding, symptom, or disease which follows administration of a vaccine, and which does not necessarily have a causal relationship with vaccine use. See [It's the Law: Report Adverse Events](#) for more information.