

THE SCOOP ON SHINGLES

Shingles (also known as herpes zoster) is a viral infection that causes a painful rash that often appears as a band of blisters that wrap from the middle of your back around one side of your chest to your breastbone. Other parts of your body can be involved including your neck, face and scalp. It's actually the same virus that causes chickenpox and after you've had chickenpox, the virus lies inactive in your nerves. Years later, the virus can reactivate as shingles!

While shingles isn't a life-threatening condition, it can be very painful. For about one in five people who develop shingles, the pain continues in the same spot long after the blisters have cleared. This condition is known as postherpetic neuralgia. Shingles can lead to other complications, including inflammation of the brain and other neurological problems. If shingles occurs on your face, it can cause hearing problems and temporary or permanent blindness.



The CDC recommends that adults age 60 and older receive the shingles vaccine (Zostavax) whether they have had shingles or not. In a clinical trial involving thousands of adults >60 years of age who were vaccinated, Zostavax reduced the risk of getting shingles by 51%. In addition, it reduced the risk of postherpetic neuralgia by 67%.

While getting the vaccine doesn't guarantee you won't get shingles, the vaccine will likely reduce the duration and severity of the disease and other complications. There are contraindications to the vaccine, so discuss YOUR need or a family member's need for the vaccination with a physician.

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