

Adult Immunizations: Shingles

Every year, thousands of adults suffer from severe illnesses, and many may even die, from diseases that can be prevented.

Shingles is an infection that can cause a painful rash, usually on one side of the body that may last for 2 to 4 weeks. The pain from a Shingles infection can be severe and can greatly affect your life for years afterward.

The good news is that Shingles can be prevented, the best way is to get vaccinated.

Shingles, also called Herpes Zoster, is an infection caused by the same virus that causes chicken pox. If you had chicken pox as a child, the virus that can cause shingles is already in your body.

For years, your healthy immune system can keep the virus from doing any damage.

But if you have a weakened immune system, or simply are just getting older, your body can't hold the virus off any longer.

The infection re-awakens and travels through your nerves and to your skin, causing a severe, sometimes very painful rash.

The best way to prevent Shingles is to get vaccinated.

A vaccine contains a dead part of a germ, in this case, the Varicella Zoster virus. It is too weak to make you sick. Instead your body reacts to the vaccine by making antibodies which fight against the virus to protect your body.

If you are 50 years old or older, talk to your healthcare provider about getting vaccinated for Shingles. Even if you don't remember having Chicken Pox, it is a good idea to get the Shingles vaccine.

If you have ever had a severe allergic reaction to a vaccine, tell your healthcare provider before getting this vaccine.

Do not get this vaccine if you are allergic to any of the ingredients in this vaccine or if you have tested negative to immunity for varicella zoster virus, currently have shingles, are pregnant or are breastfeeding.

This vaccine is given by injection.

The Shingles vaccine is a two-dose vaccine with the second dose being given 2 to 6 months after the first injection. This vaccine reduces your risk of shingles by up to 85% for four years.

If you aren't feeling well when your injection is scheduled, talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist. She may recommend you wait until you feel better to get the vaccine.

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The Shingles vaccine is safe. But as with any medication, there is a small risk of side effects. The most common side effect is a reaction at the injection site. Look for redness, swelling, and soreness at the site.

You may also feel tired or have a headache.

Any side effects should go away after a few days.

Your healthcare provider might recommend for you to take an over-the-counter pain medicine to help relieve these symptoms.

If you have a severe allergic reaction like trouble breathing, hives, swelling of your face or throat or if you have chest pain, fast heartbeat, dizziness or feel like you are going to pass out call 911 and get help immediately.

This is not the complete list of side effects. Make sure you discuss all possible side effects with your healthcare provider.

You can get your Shingles vaccine at your next healthcare appointment. Or you can get it at your local pharmacy or community health clinic.

It's a good idea to keep a list of all vaccines you get so you don't double-up in the future. Ask your healthcare provider for a print-out of your records or keep a log yourself.

Your records should include the date, type of vaccine dose and where you got it. Let a family member know where you keep this list in case of emergency.

Shingles can cause a very painful rash. But it can be prevented. If you are over the age of 50, talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist about getting vaccinated. It is the best way to prevent infection and stay healthy.