

HEALTH REALLY MATTERS

# Shingles: A burning issue

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## Quick Facts about Shingles

- About 1 out of 3 people will get shingles in their lifetime; it is more common in people over 50 years old.
- Shingles is a painful rash that appears suddenly and is caused by the varicella zoster virus.
- This is the same virus that causes chicken pox. The virus rests in your nerves and in some people it reactivates as shingles.
- The rash is made up of fluid-filled blisters. It usually appears on one side of your body.
- You can't get shingles if you've never had chicken pox.
- You can't catch shingles from someone else, but there is a small chance the virus can spread to someone who hasn't had chicken pox or the chicken pox vaccine.

- The virus can reactivate due to stress, illness, injury, certain medicines or age.
- Some people can have nerve pain after the rash goes away called post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN).

## Preventing shingles

- A vaccine is available to help reduce your chance of getting shingles by about 50%.
- The vaccine is not publicly funded, it usually costs around \$200.
- People 50 years or older can get the vaccine, only one dose is needed.
- The vaccine has been found to be very safe, some people may have some soreness, redness or itching at the site of the vaccine.
- People with weakened immune systems may not be candidates for the vaccine.

## How to treat and manage shingles

- See your doctor right away if you think you have shingles. Treatment should be started in the first three days you get the rash.
- Treatment is usually a week of an antiviral medicine taken by mouth. Creams and ointments do not work against shingles.



**MEDICINE CENTRE**  
PHARMACY

- If you have any eye problems see the doctor immediately.
- Calamine lotion can stop the itch. If it is still bothersome you can take an antihistamine.
- Keep the rash clean and dry, try not to scratch as this can cause infections.
- Wear loose cotton clothing if possible.
- Discuss how to make sure you get the most out of your antiviral medicine and suggest ways to make it easier to take your medication regularly.
- Give advice on how to manage pain from shingles.

## **Your Pharmacist can:**

- Talk about the risks and benefits of the shingles vaccine and whether it is right for you.
- Immunize you with the shingles vaccine if necessary.
- Provide an opinion on whether or not you should see a doctor if shingles is suspected.

## **Find more great health information and tools here:**

- HealthLink BC: <http://goo.gl/mcSy2d>
- Should I get a shot to prevent shingles: <http://goo.gl/MSn8hT>
- Immunize BC: <http://goo.gl/G5RnnT>

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## **Notes:**