



## What You Should Know About Shingles

August is [National Immunization Awareness Month](#), a reminder of the importance of vaccinations for children and adults. Are you up to date on your vaccinations?

[Shingles](#), which causes a painful blistering rash on the face or body, most often occurs in middle-aged adults and people whose immune systems are weakened. It is a very common disease; almost 1 out of 3 people in the United States will develop shingles in their lifetime. The same virus that causes chickenpox, varicella zoster virus (VZV) also causes shingles, although what reactivates the virus when a person is older is not clearly understood. Even people who don't recall having chickenpox as children are likely to carry the dormant virus. Research shows that 99% of adults over age 40 have had chickenpox.

While the blisters caused by shingles usually clear up within two to four weeks, some individuals experience acute nerve pain called postherpetic neuralgia (PHN) that lasts for months or years. Other possible complications from shingles include serious eye problems and loss of vision, or more rarely, pneumonia, hearing problems, brain inflammation (encephalitis), or death. Besides the painful rash, symptoms may include fever, headache, chills, and upset stomach.

### Who Should be Vaccinated?

Fortunately, there are two types of shingles vaccines that offer protection from getting shingles. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) [recommends](#) that healthy adults age 50 and older get two doses of the new shingles vaccine, Shingrix®, which is highly effective in preventing shingles and the complications it can cause. This vaccine must be given in two doses spaced 2 - 6 months apart and can be obtained by a doctor or pharmacist. Shingrix is more than 85% effective for at least the first four years after vaccination. There is no maximum age for getting Shingrix.

While the CDC recommends Shingrix because of its effectiveness, an older vaccine called Zostavax® is also available for adults who are allergic to Shingrix

or if Shingrix is unavailable. Zostavax is administered as a single shot and contains weakened chickenpox virus. Zostavax is less effective than Shingrix, especially over time as people age.

Both Zostavax and Shingrix are not foolproof; some people still get shingles even after being vaccinated, although the illness will be milder with a decreased risk for complications.

If you, or someone you know, is interested in primary care, addiction recovery services, or mental health care for children or adults, contact InterCommunity. To receive services at any of our Hartford or East Hartford locations, please call 860-569-5900.



 Like us on Facebook