

Shingles

Public Health Brief

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What is Shingles?¹

Shingles, also known as herpes zoster, is caused by varicella zoster virus (VZV), the same virus that causes chickenpox. VZV will remain dormant in the body even after a person recovers from having chickenpox. Shingles is caused when the virus reactivates later in life. **Approximately 1 out of 3 people in the US will develop shingles in their lifetime.**

Signs and Symptoms:

- A painful rash that develops on one side of the face or body. The rash contains blisters that will typically scab up in 7 to 10 days.
- *Prior to the rash appearing*, people may have pain, itching, or tingling where the rash will appear. Sometimes this can be several days before anything appears.
- Fever, headache, chills, upset stomach.

The most common complications of shingles is postherpetic neuralgia or long-term nerve pain.



Shingles Vaccine¹

Older adults are more likely to develop longer lasting and severe nerve pain from shingles compared to younger adults, making it extremely important for **anyone over 50 to get the shingles vaccine called Shingrix**. Not only does the vaccine provide protection against the virus, but it also prevents the long-term nerve pain.

The age recommendation for the shingles vaccination was lowered from 60 years or older after research revealed a sharp increase in risk for getting shingles after the age of 50. In 2017, Maryland had higher rates of shingles vaccination than the United States. However, less than half of adults aged 65 and older had been vaccinated for shingles in both Maryland and the U.S as of 2017.

Sources:

1. CDC Shingles (Herpes Zoster) <https://www.cdc.gov/shingles/index.html>
2. America's Health Rankings https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/senior/measure/Shingles_vaccine_sr/state/MD2.
3. The Epidemiology of Herpes Zoster <https://academic.oup.com/cid/article/69/2/341/5213085>
4. Prevention of Herpes Zoster <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5705a1.htm>

Shingles Vaccine Rates²

Received Shingles Vaccination - 65 and Over

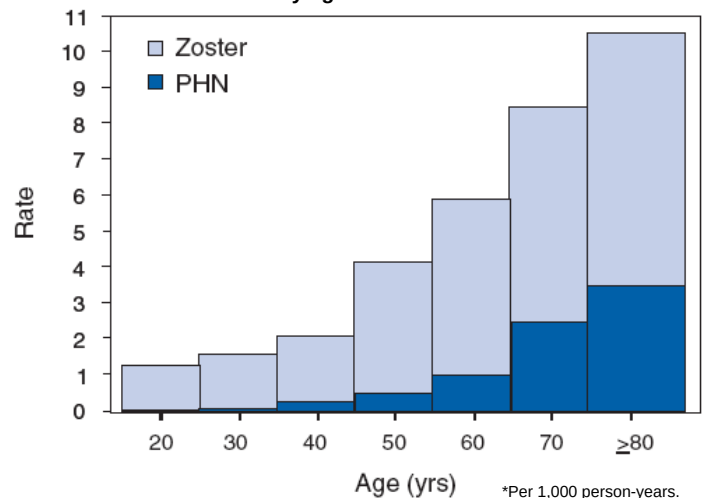
Maryland	47.4%
United States	44.4%

²Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey, 2017

Highlight: Shingles and Young Adults

Shingles has historically been believed to occur only in older adults. However, the last decade has seen a trend that says otherwise. A retrospective study found an increase in the incidence of shingles in younger adults and that the rates in older adults has been plateauing since 2008.³ More research is needed to fully explain this trend. However, possible explanations include 1) that more people are seeking health care, leading to an increase in case-finding and 2) there has been an increase in individuals who are immunocompromised or have chronic conditions, leading to an increase in people who are at risk for the disease. Other experts have suspected that chickenpox (varicella) vaccine does not have as strong of immunity than being exposed to the virus naturally, which may increase the risk for reactivation of varicella zoster.¹ However, rates were starting to increase prior to the varicella vaccine, and other countries have seen similar trends that do not have routine vaccination programs. Even with younger people getting shingles on the rise, postherpetic nerve pain is fortunately rare for people 40 and younger.³

Rate of zoster and postherpetic neuralgia (PHN)[†] rates*, by age - United States⁴



*Per 1,000 person-years.
[†]Defined as ≥ 30 days of pain.