

Got Shingles?

Nope, not the kind for your roof. The other kind. The one you've heard causes an itchy rash. You've also heard that there is a vaccine that people over 50 can get to prevent shingles. Are you over 50? What did you say? You've been meaning to get that vaccine but haven't gotten around to it yet? Then, "listen up!" This story is for you.

At my annual appointment last year, my primary care doctor reminded me to get the shingles vaccine, called Shingrix. It was November and I thought, "I'll get it after the holidays." Bad decision. Very bad decision!

In early January I noticed an odd crescent-shaped indent on my forehead above my eyebrow. The next day, there were a few raised bumps around that indent.

Day 3: terrible earache; many more raised bumps on my forehead and below my eyebrow. It was a Saturday so I went to Urgent Care, where I got an incorrect diagnosis of a bacterial skin infection and a topical cream prescription from the doctor on duty.

Day 4: my eye was swollen shut. The whole right side of my head felt like it was on fire. I went back to Urgent Care. The RN on duty took one look and told me I had shingles.

To make a long story short, for the next month I was absolutely miserable. My ear hurt, my eye hurt, my skin hurt. Pain meds helped me sleep, but if I rolled over, the pain woke me up.

The scabs from the shingles rash gradually healed but the pain continued, from the top of my head all the way down the right side of my face and neck. I saw my regular doctor. I saw my eye doctor. I saw a neurologist. It turns out that I have "[postherpetic neuralgia](#)." You can Google it. It's a complication associated with shingles. About 20% of people with shingles develop this lingering nerve pain.



Nine months later the area of pain is much smaller, but my eye and forehead still hurt. My ability to read is limited. I have been seeing my ophthalmologist twice a month and my neurologist once a month. I'm still on medication and eye drops. It's not clear when this pain will go away. Not convinced to get the shingles vaccine yet? Take a look at this picture of my swollen eye, taken in January. Everyone I've shown it to has made an appointment at their local pharmacy to get the shingles shots if they weren't already vaccinated.

Consider this a public service announcement that might prevent you from going through the misery of shingles.

- You think you don't need to get vaccinated because you never had chicken pox? Check with your doctor. The vaccine is probably still recommended.

- You got a shingles vaccine a long time ago? Shingrix is much more effective than the earlier vaccine (Zostavax) so if you got your shot before 2017, you probably didn't get Shingrix. Check with your doctor about whether you should get the new vaccine.
- Okay, where can I get vaccinated? At your local pharmacy.
- Do I need a doctor's referral? No, just call your pharmacy to schedule the shot.
- Is it one shot? No, it is two doses, two to six months apart.
- What is the cost? Ask your pharmacy or check the [Shingrix](#) website.
- More questions? Check out the shingles information on the [Mayo Clinic's website](#).

No more excuses! Get vaccinated!

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September 2021