

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM SHINGLES

If you had chickenpox as a child, you may still recall the intense itching and endless days of applying calamine lotion to sooth the pain. No one wants to relive that experience, but without proper immunization, 1 in 3 people will develop a related virus known as “Shingles.”

The chickenpox virus remains in your nervous system and can reemerge at any time, without warning, and for no known reason. Unfortunately, there is no way to determine who will develop Shingles, when it may occur, or how long it will last. Studies have shown that Shingles most commonly occurs in those ages 60 and older, and that the rash, resulting complications, and long-term nerve pain may increase in duration and severity based on your age at the time the Shingles virus develops.

Initial signs of Shingles may include itching, tingling, or burning as a red, blistering rash begins to develop on one side of the body where the nerves from the spinal cord connect with the skin. 1 in 4 adults who develop Shingles will experience complications including scarring, skin infection, muscle weakness, and decrease or loss of vision or hearing. The painful, itchy rash may last up to 30 days, and can be compounded by long-term nerve pain that has been described as “shooting,” “stabbing,” “throbbing,” or “burning.”

Adults age 60 and older can help prevent the development of Shingles by receiving the live Zostavax™ vaccine. If you do develop Shingles after receiving Zostavax™, the vaccination may decrease or prevent the severity of nerve pain that typically accompanies Shingles.

Typical side effects of any vaccination may include soreness or redness at the injection site, or mild swelling or discomfort, but the protective benefits far outweigh the minimal inconvenience and the potential consequence. The Zostavax™ vaccine is considered a medical benefit under most primary, private, and Medicare health insurance plans.

More than 1 million cases of Shingles are diagnosed each year in the United States. Don't be one of them! Contact your physician, health care provider, or the Farmington Valley VNA's Community Programs Department at 860-651-3539 for more information on the Shingles vaccine and to schedule an appointment for your immunization.