

Shingles Raises Heart and Stroke Risk

Protect Yourself with Vaccination

FEATURE IMPACT

Shingles isn't just a painful rash and nerve pain. It's also linked with a higher risk of serious cardiovascular events, including heart attack and stroke, especially in the weeks to months after infection. However, shingles is largely preventable with vaccination.

The world's leading nonprofit organization focused on changing the future of health for all, the American Heart Association, reminds eligible adults to protect themselves by getting vaccinated and staying on top of their heart health.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about 1 in 3 adults in the U.S. will get shingles in their lifetime. If you've had chickenpox, the virus that causes shingles, also known as herpes zoster, is already inside you. It can "wake up" years later, causing painful blisters and nerve pain that can last for months or longer.

After a shingles episode, one large study published in the "Journal of the American Heart Association" found the risk of heart attack and stroke was nearly 30% higher in the short term and may persist over time.

"Shingles can be very painful and knock you down for weeks," said Eduardo Sanchez, M.D., FAHA, the American Heart Association's chief medical officer for prevention. "It's also associated with a higher chance of heart and stroke problems afterward. If you're 50 or older, or have a weakened immune system, talk to your doctor or pharmacist about the shingles vaccine. It's a simple step that can keep you healthier."

Knowing your risk is the first step toward prevention. Age is the most important risk factor for developing shingles. As people age, their immune systems naturally weaken, making it easier for the virus to reactivate. People over 50, and especially those living with heart disease, diabetes or other chronic illnesses, are more likely to develop shingles.

The risk of serious complications from shingles increases:

- As you get older
- If you take drugs that keep your immune system from working properly, like steroids and drugs given after an organ transplant

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By Neil Manausa

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