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## Adults age 50 and older urged to get shingles vaccine

Health officials are urging adults age 50 and older to get vaccinated against shingles. Caused by the same virus associated with chickenpox, shingles is more common and serious in older adults.

Health officials estimate that one out of three people in the United States will develop shingles during their lifetime. About half of the nearly 1 million Americans who experienced shingles in the past year were those 60 years and older. For some, the blistering skin rash can lead to severe pain that can last for months or even years. Other complications of shingles include eye problems and, less often, pneumonia, hearing problems, blindness and brain inflammation (encephalitis). In rare instances, shingles also can lead to death.

“After a person recovers from chickenpox, the virus stays in the body in a dormant state. For reasons that are not fully known, the virus can reactivate many years later, causing shingles,” says Dr. William Heymann, Sarasota County Health Department medical executive director.

“The likelihood of getting shingles or experiencing severe and lasting complications is greatly reduced in those who get the shingles vaccine,” says Dr. Heymann. “Shingles vaccine is only needed once. You can get shingles more than once so it is advisable to get the vaccine even if you have had the disease. Those who have been vaccinated and then later get shingles usually have a much milder experience.”

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved the vaccine for use in persons 50 years of age and older. The vaccine, which is 60 percent effective in preventing shingles, has few -- if any -- side effects.

“Those who receive the shingles vaccine at the Sarasota County Health Department may only be required to pay their co-pay if they have coverage for the vaccine through Medicare Part D. Be sure to bring your card with you so we can file the appropriate claim for payment,” says Sarasota County Health Department Immunization Program Director Donna Keith.

The Sarasota County Health Department offers adult vaccines, including the shingles vaccine, daily at its two Sarasota County locations. The department also will hold shingles vaccine clinics for groups of 30 or more at a single location such as a manufactured home community or recreation center.

For information or to make an appointment for a shingles vaccine, call 941-861-2784 in Sarasota or 941-861-3864 in North Port. For a shingles vaccine clinic, call 941-861-2784. Visit the health department’s website at [www.sarasotahealth.org/services/immunizations-shingles.htm](http://www.sarasotahealth.org/services/immunizations-shingles.htm) for additional information.

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