

2023 Shingles Awareness Week

Highlighting the gaps in knowledge and services for Shingles in Canada

Herpes zoster (shingles) is caused by the reactivation of the varicella zoster virus.(1) Originating from the same virus that causes chickenpox, shingles typically develops later in life, predominantly in adults over the age of 50.(2) The tell-tale sign of shingles is a rash forming on one side of the body or face. (3) The major complication of shingles is postherpetic neuralgia which is characterized as a debilitating long-term neurogenic pain that prevents many patients from carrying out their daily functions.(2,4)

While shingles is not particularly a life-threatening disease, and as such is often over-looked when formulating policies and programs, its complications are associated with significant medical costs, as well as indirect costs such as increased burdens on the healthcare system, and lost productivity. With this in mind it is crucially important to invest in preventative efforts and increase efforts to raise awareness among Canadians, of which 1 in 3 will develop shingles in their lifetime and with those 50+ accounting for more than two-thirds of all cases.(2) Furthermore, there are 130,000 new cases of shingles each year in Canada, with 17,000 reports of postherpetic neuralgia and 20 deaths.(2) Shingles not only impacts the quality of life of the affected individual, but it also places a burden on their families and the healthcare system.

Amidst the backdrop of the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing and in the context of vaccine hesitancy among the Canadian population, it is of utmost importance to explore health promotion campaigns to increase awareness about vaccine preventable diseases and inform the public about the benefits of a life course approach to immunization.

Aligned with the mission of improving lives of older people and influencing age-related policy, the International Federation on Ageing (IFA) is hosting the Shingles Awareness Week in Canada Campaign (27th February – 5th March 2023) targeting policy makers, patients and advocacy organizations and will feature a variety of communications, including podcasts, a Q&A video, twitter fact sheet and a comprehensive message bank.

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The International Federation on Ageing (IFA) is an international, non-governmental organization (NGO) with a unique membership base comprising government, NGOs, academics, industry, and individuals in over 80 countries. Nearly 50 years old, the IFA has become known as a leading and innovative organization that works across disciplines and sectors toward common goals that improve the lives of older people. Through the IFA's formal relations with the World Health Organization (WHO) and general consultative status at the United Nations and its agencies, the IFA is in the position to advocate directly with member states and contribute to and inform intergovernmental dialogue.

References:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. How Shingles Spreads | CDC [Internet]. 2019 [cited 2023 Feb 12]. Available from [here](#).
2. Government of Canada. Herpes zoster (shingles) vaccine: Canadian Immunization Guide - Canada.ca [Internet]. 2022 [cited 2023 Feb 12]. Available from [here](#).
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Signs and Symptoms of Shingles (Herpes Zoster) | CDC [Internet]. 2019 [cited 2023 Feb 12]. Available from [here](#).
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Shingles (Herpes Zoster); Complication of Shingles [Internet]. 2019 [cited 2023 Feb 12]. Available from [here](#).