

Pain of shingles (herpes zoster) significantly interferes with daily life

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Acute herpes zoster, or shingles, interferes with all health areas for people with the condition, including sleep, enjoyment of life and general activities, according to a study published in *CMAJ* (*Canadian Medical Association Journal*).

Herpes zoster is a reactivation of the [chicken pox](#) (varicella-zoster) virus which results in pain and a rash with small blisters. It occurs in people who have had chicken pox and is most common in people over the age of 50, although younger people can have the condition. The lifetime risk of developing [shingles](#) is about 30%, but may increase as life expectancies increase.

Policymakers are being asked to consider implementing vaccination programs for the [herpes](#) zoster vaccine which is available as a preventative tool but more information is needed about the impact of shingles.

The MASTER study (Monitoring and Assessing Shingles Through Education and Research) was conducted in Canada to provide an in-depth understanding of the impact of shingles. The multi-centre study involved outpatients recruited through [general practitioners](#) or specialists across Canada.

"Acute herpes zoster significantly affected quality-of-life and functional status," writes Dr. Marc Brisson, Laval University, with coauthors.

"Sleeping, enjoyment of life, general activities, mood, normal work and

quality-of-life domains of pain/discomfort and usual activities were particularly diminished. This was consistently observed across all age groups."

The discomfort of shingles can also persist for months after the acute phase, with 24% of people in the study developing pain (postherpetic neuralgia) after the rash healed. The risk increased for older people.

The researchers conclude that this study reinforces "the need for effective prevention strategies, such as vaccination, and additional early intervention to reduce the burden of herpes zoster and postherpetic neuralgia."

Provided by Canadian Medical Association Journal

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