



February 2022

Ms. Sylvia Y. Cyrus  
Executive Director  
Association of the Study of African American Life and History

Re: Black Health Matters: Shingles and African Americans over 50: What You Should Know About Your Immune System

Dear Ms. Cyrus:

[Black Health Matters](#) (BHM) is the leading health and chronic disease management platform founded to improve health outcomes by improving health literacy. We do this utilizing a cross-platform approach that reaches and engages through digital communication, newsletters, social media and experiential programs. We are writing to request support for an upcoming newsletter campaign that will educate members of The Association of the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) on the causes of shingles, risk factors and prevention. We believe that this educational tool aligns with ASALH's 2022 annual theme "Black Health and Wellness".

### **Background**

As an ethnic group, African Americans experience significant disparities with chronic conditions, access to care, preventive screenings, and mental health.<sup>1</sup> The underlying causes of the health disparities have been linked to genetics, lack of economic resources, limited access to health care, delay in treatment, inability to afford prescription medications, cultural beliefs, low literacy/health literacy rates and certain environmental factors.

Decades of disparities in education, housing, jobs and stress levels have contributed to an excess risk of chronic disease based on race, ethnicity and income. Ongoing stress, chronic conditions (diabetes, heart disease) that disproportionately impact African Americans age the immune system, making it more likely to get a cold, the flu or shingles.<sup>2</sup> Further, undergoing cancer treatments and taking certain medications may also trigger the debilitating condition.<sup>3</sup> And if you've had chickenpox, you're at risk for shingles.

More than 99% of Americans born before 1980 have had chickenpox—even in Black communities.<sup>4</sup> The good news is there is a vaccine for it.<sup>5</sup> Yet, African Americans are least likely to receive the shingles vaccine.<sup>6</sup>

### **About Black Health Matters**

In 2012, Roslyn Daniels, Founder & President, was inspired by the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and founded Black Health Matters one year prior to the Black Lives Matters movement. The ACA provides access to health care, which is monumental, but not impactful, unless one has a basic understanding of what a healthy lifestyle entail. Just incorporating the basics, such as sleeping 7-8 hours, exercising, hydrating, eating fruits and vegetables will give someone a chance to fight chronic disease.

### **Conclusion**

As the dominant cultural health influencer, Black Health Matters exists to guide millions of African Americans on best practices in risk modification for healthier lifestyles. The nation's leading pharmaceutical companies such as AbbVie, Bristol Myers Squibb, Janssen, GSK, Genentech, and Pfizer, to name a few, support us in evangelizing that #BlackHealthMatters! Yet, it is our community partners, committed to social action—ASALH, Jack and Jill of America, Inc., The Links, Incorporated, National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., 100 Black Men of America, Inc. and more who expand our reach to make health a priority in the African American community. We look forward to collaborating with you again in the near future.

Sincerely,

Makalia Weeks  
Project Manager  
The Black Health Matters Foundation

### **References**

1. CDC, 2020. Summary Health Statistics: National Health Interview Survey: 2018. Table A-3a <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis/shs/tables.htm>
2. What Is Your Immune System? <https://www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/immune-system-function>
3. Shingles – Symptoms & Causes <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/shingles/symptoms-causes/syc-20353054>
4. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention – Shingles (Herpes Zoster) <https://www.cdc.gov/shingles/about/index.html>
5. Centers for Disease for Disease Control and Prevention: Vaccines and Preventable Diseases <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/shingles/public/shingrix/index.html>
6. Blacks Least Likely to Get Shingles Protection <http://www.louisianaweekly.com/blacks-least-likely-to-get-shingles-protection-according-to-study/>