



UK Health
Security
Agency

NHS

Shingles

A photograph of an elderly couple embracing outdoors. The woman has short white hair and is wearing a yellow scarf and a light-colored cardigan. The man has grey hair, wears glasses, and a light-colored sweater. They are both smiling and looking at each other. The background is a soft-focus autumn scene with trees and foliage.

There's a vaccine
to help protect you
from the pain

immunisation

the safest way to protect your health

There is a vaccine that helps reduce your risk of getting shingles and reduces the severity of symptoms if you develop the disease.

Shingles is caused by the same virus as chickenpox. Anyone can develop shingles because most people have had chickenpox (even if they don't remember having it).

This leaflet describes shingles and the benefits of the vaccination and who is eligible for the vaccine this year.

This leaflet explains about the Zostavax vaccine.

If you have problems with your immune system and cannot have the live Zostavax vaccine you may be eligible for 2 doses of the Shingrix vaccine.

Please see the Shingrix leaflet link:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/shingrix-vaccine-for-people-with-weakened-immune-systems

Shingles isn't like other infectious diseases because you don't catch it from someone else. Most of us had chickenpox when we were young, although some of us will not be aware that we've had it.

If you did have it, then the virus that caused it can stay in your body for the rest of your life without you knowing it is there. If the virus reactivates it causes a disease called shingles.

Shingles can be very painful and tends to affect people more commonly as they get older.

And the older you are, the worse it can be. For some, the pain caused by shingles can last for many years. Shingles can really affect your life, stopping you from doing all the things you usually enjoy.

What is shingles?

Shingles (also known as herpes zoster) is caused by the reactivation of an infection of a nerve and the area of skin that it serves, resulting in clusters of painful, itchy, fluid-filled blisters. These blisters can burst and turn into sores that eventually crust over and heal. These blisters usually affect an area on one side of the body, most commonly the chest but sometimes also the head, face and eye.



How long does it last and how serious can it be?

The rash usually appears a few days after the initial pain and tingling and lasts for about a week. The older you are, the more likely you are to have long-lasting pain. Sometimes shingles develops in the eye and may also affect the eyelid.



This can cause severe pain and lead to decreased vision or even permanent blindness in that eye. Most people recover fully, but for some, the pain goes on for several months or even years – this is called post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN).

This is a particularly unpleasant condition with severe burning, throbbing or stabbing nerve pain. The vaccine reduces the risk of getting shingles and PHN. Even if you still get shingles, the symptoms may be much reduced.

What causes shingles?

Shingles is caused by the same virus that causes chickenpox – the varicella zoster virus. When you recover from chickenpox most of the virus is destroyed but some survives and lies inactive in the nervous system. It can then reactivate later in life when your immune system is weakened by increasing age, stress or conditions/treatments that reduce your immunity.

How do you catch shingles?

You don't catch shingles. Chickenpox virus caught earlier in your life reactivates later to cause shingles. You can't catch shingles from someone who has chickenpox.

However, if you have shingles blisters, the virus in the fluid can infect someone who has not had chickenpox and they may develop chickenpox.

You become eligible for shingles vaccine as you turn 70 years of age and you remain eligible up to 79 years of age.

How common is shingles?

About 1 in 5 people who have had chickenpox develop shingles. This means that every year in England and Wales, tens of thousands of people will get shingles. It is more common in people aged over 70 years, and of these, about 14,000 go on to develop PHN and over 1,400 are admitted to hospital because of it.

How effective is the vaccination?

By having the vaccination you will significantly reduce your chance of developing shingles. In fact, in the first 3 years since the vaccine was introduced there were about 17,000 fewer GP consultations for shingles. And, if you do go on to have shingles the symptoms are likely to be milder and the illness shorter, than if you had not had the vaccination.

How and when is the vaccine given?

Like most vaccinations, the vaccine will be given in your upper arm. You will only have the vaccination once.

If you have the Zostavax vaccine, you will just need 1 injection. If you are not eligible for the live

vaccine, you will need 2 doses of the Shingrix vaccine 2 months apart to give you the best protection. Once your course is completed, you will not need any more shingles vaccines.

Will there be any side effects?

Side effects are usually quite mild and don't last very long. The most common side effects, which occur in at least 1 in every 10 people, are headache, and redness, pain, swelling, itching, warmth, and bruising at the site of the injection. If the side effects persist for more than a few days you should discuss this with your GP or practice nurse.

How safe is the vaccine – has it been used in other countries?

Like all licensed vaccines, the shingles vaccine has been thoroughly tested and meets UK and European safety and licensing requirements. It has been used extensively in several countries including the United States of America and Canada.

In the first 4 years of the shingles vaccination programme more than 2.3 million people were vaccinated in England.

Who will get the vaccine?

Those aged 70 years of age are eligible for the vaccine.

The vaccine is also available for those previously eligible but who missed immunisation. For example, anyone in their 70s who has not yet had the vaccine.

What about people who are under 70 or over 80, will they be getting the vaccine?

People under 70 years of age are at lower risk of shingles but will become eligible for the vaccine when they turn 70. People aged 80 years and over are not eligible for the shingles vaccination because the vaccine becomes less effective as people get older. If you are worried about shingles speak to your GP.

Do I need to do anything to get the vaccination?

Yes, if you are eligible, contact your GP practice to make an appointment to have your vaccination.

Are there people who shouldn't have the vaccination?

There are 2 shingles vaccines available. One contains a weakened version of the live shingles virus.

The live vaccine is the one that is routinely used in the UK but people who have weakened immune systems, for example due to cancer treatment, should not have it.

They should have the inactivated shingles vaccine. Your doctor will advise whether this applies to you. For information on this vaccine please see the leaflet Link: **www.gov.uk/government/publications/shingrix-vaccine-for-people-with-weakened-immune-systems**.

If you've had a severe reaction to any of the substances that go into the vaccine, you shouldn't have it. Again, your GP will advise you.

The live shingles vaccine used in the UK contains porcine gelatine. Some people may not want this vaccine but it is the recommended vaccine unless you cannot have it because you have a weakened immune system.

If you have the Zostavax vaccine, you will just need 1 injection. If you are not eligible for the live vaccine, you will need 2 doses of the Shingrix vaccine 2 months apart to give you the best protection. Once your course is completed, you will not need any more shingles vaccines.

Can the vaccine give me shingles?

Most people do not get a rash from the vaccine but in the rare event that you do, please seek advice from your GP practice.

What if I miss my vaccination? Can I have it later?

If you missed the shingles vaccine, you can still have it up to your 80th birthday. Please contact your GP practice to make an appointment. It's important that you do not leave it too late to have the vaccination.

Remember if you were eligible for immunisation in previous years of the programme and have not been vaccinated against shingles, you remain eligible until your 80th birthday.

Further information

Speak to your GP or practice nurse, for more information before or after you've had the vaccination. You can also visit the NHS website at www.nhs.uk/shingles

For more information about the Shingles vaccine Zostavax®, visit www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/6101/pil

For more information about the Shingles vaccine Shingrix® visit www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/12054/pil#gref



Summary of the disease and the vaccine

Shingles

- is a common disease that can cause long-lasting, severe pain
- has been known to cause permanent disability
- occurs more frequently in those over 70 years of age who are also more likely to have worse symptoms

The vaccine

- is significantly reducing the number of cases
- will reduce the severity of symptoms in vaccinated people if they develop the disease
- has been used extensively in the US and Canada
- cannot cause shingles in healthy people

Having your routine shingles vaccination is a good way of looking after your health so that you can get on with enjoying life without the pain of shingles.



shinglessupport.org.uk



facialpalsy.org.uk

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