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# Shingles vaccination for those aged 70 to 79



**Shingles affects a lot of people as they get older.**

**It often causes severe pain which can last for months or sometimes years.**

**Shingles is more common and more severe the older you are.**

**There is a vaccine to help protect older people from shingles and the long term pain that can follow.**

## **What is shingles?**

Shingles (also known as herpes zoster) is an infection of a nerve and the skin around it. It usually causes a painful rash of fluid-filled blisters. The blisters burst and turn into sores. The rash usually affects an area on just one side of the body, most commonly the chest but sometimes 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 pain starts, and the blisters crust over in about a week but can last longer.

Most people recover fully, but for some the pain can go on for several months and sometimes lasts for years. The older you are, the more likely you are to have long-lasting pain. This is called post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN) and can cause a severe burning, throbbing or stabbing pain. Current treatments for PHN are not very effective.

Sometimes shingles affects the eye or the skin around the eye. This can cause severe pain or even blindness.

## What causes shingles?

Shingles is caused by the same virus as chickenpox – varicella zoster virus.

When you recover from chickenpox, most of the virus is destroyed but some survives and lies inactive in the body. This virus can reactivate later in life when your immune system is weakened by things such as age, stress or drugs that reduce immune response.

## How do you catch shingles?

You don't catch shingles. Chickenpox virus caught earlier in life reactivates later to cause shingles. However, the fluid in shingles blisters can cause chickenpox by infecting someone who has never had it (usually a child).

## How common is shingles?

Almost everyone gets chickenpox and about one in five people who have had it go on to get shingles later in life.

Every year in England and Wales, tens of thousands of people will get shingles. It is most common in people aged 70 years and over, and of these:

- about 14,000 go on to develop PHN and
- over 1,400 are admitted to hospital.

Around one in 1,000 people over 70 who gets shingles dies of the infection.

## Is gelatine used in the shingles vaccine?

Yes. Zostavax<sup>®</sup>, the shingles vaccine used in the UK contains porcine gelatine. Gelatine is a substance used in a wide variety of foods and medicines including some capsules and vaccines.

## **How effective is the vaccination?**

Shingles vaccination will reduce your chances of developing shingles by more than a third. If you do go on to have shingles it will probably be a milder and shorter illness.

## **Where is the vaccination given and will I need one every year?**

Most people will have the vaccine at their GP surgery.

The vaccine will be given in your upper arm. You only need one vaccination. You do not need it every year.

## **Will there be any side effects?**

Some people get side effects after having this vaccine, they are usually quite mild and don't last very long. The most common side effects are headache and redness, pain, swelling, itching, warmth or bruising at the site of the injection. If the side effects last for more than a few days you should discuss this with your GP or practice nurse.

## **Should I take any precautions after vaccination?**

Rarely a rash of small blisters develops where the injection was given. If this happens, the rash should be covered,

and until it crusts over, you should avoid contact with newborn babies, anyone with a weakened immune system or who is pregnant, especially if they have never had chickenpox.

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

The shingles vaccine has been thoroughly tested and meets UK and European safety and licensing requirements. It has been used routinely across the UK since 2013, and also widely in other countries including the United States of America and Canada.

## Who will get the vaccine?

From 1 April 2018, a free shingles vaccination is being offered to people who on 1 September 2018 are aged 70 to 75 or 77 to 79.

These are:

- People born between 02/09/1942 and 01/09/1948 and
- People born between 02/09/1938 and 01/09/1941 (and aged under 80 on the day of vaccination).

These are people who on **1 September 2018** are aged 70 to 75 or 77 to 79.

From 1 April 2019 the vaccine will be available for all those aged 70 to 79.

## **What about people outside the 70 to 79 age group?**

Shingles is less common in younger people and those aged under 70 will not routinely get the vaccine.

The vaccine is less effective as people get older and people aged 80 and over will not be routinely vaccinated.

## **Do I need to do anything to get the vaccination?**

Ask at your GP practice about having the vaccine. You may be able to have it with your flu jab, but can have it at any time of year. If you are age 70-79 but have not yet been vaccinated, contact your GP surgery.

## **Are there people who shouldn't have the vaccination?**

People who have a weakened immune system, due to illness or treatment, should not have the vaccine. Also anyone who has had a severe reaction to anything used in the vaccine shouldn't have it. Your GP or practice nurse will check this with you before giving the vaccine.

## Where can I get more information?

You can find out more about the vaccine, including vaccine contents and potential side effects, at [www.medicines.org.uk/emc/](http://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/) by entering the name of the vaccine in the search box and looking at the patient information leaflet (PIL).

The routine immunisation schedule showing which immunisations are offered in Wales is available from [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/livewell/vaccinations/Leaflets/](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/livewell/vaccinations/Leaflets/)

Information on reporting suspected side effects can be found online <https://yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/> or call the Yellow Card hotline **0800 731 6789** – Mon-Fri 10:00-14:00).

If you have any questions or want more information, talk to your doctor or nurse or call NHS Direct Wales on **0845 4647** or visit [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/)

To order more copies of this leaflet, email: [Health.Info@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:Health.Info@wales.nhs.uk) or telephone **029 2010 4650**.

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