



Public Health  
England



There's now a  
**vaccine to help**  
protect you against  
**shingles**



**i**mmunisation

the safest way to protect your health

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

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

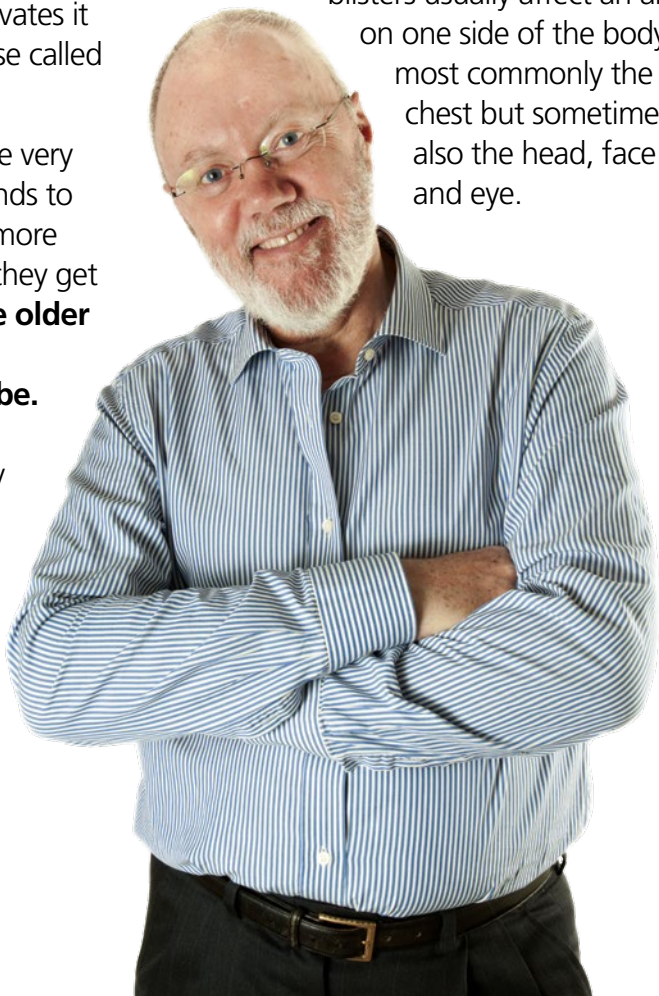
Shingles isn't like other infectious diseases because you don't catch it from someone else. Most of us had chickenpox when we were young, although some of us will not be aware that we've had it. If you did have it, then the virus that caused it can stay in your body for the rest of your life without 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.

## 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.



All people aged 70 on 1 September 2016 are eligible to get the vaccine. In addition, this year anyone who is 78 on 1 September 2016 can also receive the vaccine.

### **How common is shingles?**

About one in five 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 1400 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. 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.

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

Like most vaccinations, the vaccine will be given in your upper arm. You will only have the vaccination once – unlike the flu jab, you do not need to be re-vaccinated every year.

### **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 one in every ten 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 two years of the shingles vaccination programme more than 913,000 people were vaccinated in England.

## Who will get the vaccine?

All people aged 70 on 1 September 2016 (i.e. all those born between 2 September 1945 and 1 September 1946, inclusive). People aged 78 will also be offered the vaccine in a catch up programme (i.e. all those born between 2 September 1937 and 1 September 1938, inclusive).

The vaccine is also available for those previously eligible but who missed immunisation. For example, those born

from 2 September 1942 to 1 September 1945 and those born from 2 September 1936 to 1 September 1937 up to the day before their 80<sup>th</sup> birthday.

## What about people who aren't 70 or 78, will they be getting it?

People under 70 years of age are at lower risk of shingles but will become eligible for the vaccine in the year following their seventieth birthday. 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?

No; your doctor will invite you for the vaccination. You can have it at the same time as your flu jab in the autumn (although you can have it at any time of the year once you're eligible).

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

People who have weakened immune systems, for example due to cancer treatment, should not have the vaccine. Your doctor will advise whether this applies to you. Also, 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 shingles vaccine in use in the UK contains porcine gelatine. Some people may not want to have the vaccine but this is the only shingles vaccine available worldwide.

## Should I take any precautions after having the vaccination?

If you get a rash after having the vaccination you should seek advice from your GP.

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

If you are unable to go to the appointment offered, then please contact your GP practice to re-arrange it. It's important that you do not leave it too late to have the vaccination.

## 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 Choices website at [www.nhs.uk/shingles](http://www.nhs.uk/shingles)

Remember that patients who were eligible for immunisation in the first three years of the programme but who have not been vaccinated against shingles remain eligible until their 80<sup>th</sup> birthday.

# 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 who are also more likely to have worse symptoms.

## The vaccine

- is expected to significantly reduce the number of cases
- will reduce the severity of symptoms in vaccinated people if they develop the disease
- has been used extensively in the USA and Canada.



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