NHS SCOTLAND



Protect yourself against **shingles**

Aged 70 or 79?





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SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

Unlike other infectious illnesses, you can't catch shingles from someone else. Instead, if you've ever had chickenpox, the virus that causes shingles lies inactive in your body and can become active again later in life.

Shingles (also known as herpes zoster) can be very painful and is more common among older people. And the older you are, the worse it can be. For some people, the pain can last for many years.

But now there is a vaccine that can reduce your risk of getting shingles, or, if you do get shingles, it can reduce how serious the symptoms will be.

This leaflet describes shingles and the benefits of the vaccine.

What causes shingles?

Shingles is caused by a virus called varicella zoster, the same virus that causes chickenpox. When you recover from chickenpox most of this virus is destroyed, but some survives and lies inactive in your body's nervous system. The virus can then become active again later in life, when your immune system has been weakened by age, stress or certain treatments that can reduce your immunity.

The shingles vaccine protects you by boosting your immunity. This can reduce your risk of developing shingles or, if you do get shingles, it can reduce how serious the symptoms will be.

What are the symptoms of shingles?

When the chickenpox virus becomes active again as shingles, it usually infects a specific nerve and the area of skin around it. The infection causes a rash with very painful blisters that are filled with fluid. The blisters can burst and will eventually crust over and heal.

These blisters usually appear on a specific part of one side of the body, usually on the chest, but sometimes they also affect the head, face and eyes.

How long does shingles last and how serious is it?

The shingles rash usually appears a few days after the pain begins and lasts for about a week, but the pain can last much longer. And the older you are, the more likely you are to have long-lasting pain. In some cases, the pain persists for several months or even years – this is called post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN). Current treatments for PHN are not very effective, but the shingles vaccine reduces the risk of getting shingles and PHN.

How do you catch shingles?

You can't catch shingles. It is caused when the chickenpox virus (caught when you were younger) becomes active again in your nerves later in your life. We don't know exactly why the virus becomes active again, but it might be because immunity (protection against infection and disease) is lower in older people and in those who are stressed or have a condition that affects the immune system, such as cancer.

You can't catch shingles from someone who has chickenpox. However, if you have shingles blisters then the virus in the fluid can infect someone who has not had chickenpox (usually a child) and they may develop chickenpox.

How common is shingles?

In Scotland around 7000 people aged 70 years and over get shingles every year. Between 700–1400 of these people develop PHN (see page 3) and around 600 are admitted to hospital for treatment.

So introducing the vaccine could prevent many people from getting shingles and PHN, and reduce the number of people who are treated in hospital.

How does the vaccine work?

The vaccine contains a weakened form of the virus that causes shingles. Because the virus in the vaccine is weakened it does not cause the illness. It helps to build up your immunity to the virus, so the next time it becomes active again in your body you will fight it off more easily.

How effective is the vaccine?

By having the vaccine you will be reducing your chances of developing shingles by more than a third. If you do go on to have shingles, the symptoms will be milder and will not last as long as they would have if you had not been immunised.

Where is the vaccine given?

Like most immunisations, the vaccine will be given as an injection in your upper arm. You only need one injection.

Will there be any side effects?

Side effects are usually quite mild and don't last very long. The most common side effects, which affect at least 1 in 10 people, include headaches as well as redness or tenderness where the injection was given.

If you experience side effects that last for more than a few days, make an appointment to see your GP or practice nurse.

How safe is the vaccine?

Before they are allowed to be used, all medicines (including vaccines) are tested to assess their safety and effectiveness. Once they have been licensed for use, their safety continues to be monitored.

Who will get the vaccine?

The shingles vaccine will be offered to all people aged 70 on 1 September 2013 (this includes all people who are born between 2 September 1942 and 1 September 1943).

In 2013/14, 79 year olds will also be offered the vaccine (this includes all people who are born between 2 September 1933 and 1 September 1934).

What about people who aren't 70 or 79, will they be getting the vaccine?

People under 70 years of age will be invited for the vaccine in the year following their 70th birthday.

People aged 80 and over will not be offered the shingles immunisation because the vaccine is less effective as people get older.

I have had shingles before, should I still get the vaccine?

Yes. Even if you have already had shingles, you could still get it again. The vaccine will reduce your risk of getting shingles again, or, if you do get shingles, it can reduce how serious the symptoms will be.

When will I get the vaccine?

Once you're eligible, your GP will invite you to an appointment for the vaccine. While you can have this vaccine at any time of year, for many patients it will likely be offered at the same time that you get your seasonal flu vaccine.

Do I need the vaccine every year?

No. This is a one-off vaccine and you do not need to get it again.

Are there reasons why I shouldn't have the vaccine?

You should not have the shingles vaccine if you have had a severe reaction to any of the ingredients in the vaccine. If you currently have a severely weakened immune system (for example, due to certain cancer treatments) then you should not have the vaccine. Your GP will tell you whether or not this applies to you and can discuss any concerns.

Most medications can be taken at the same time as the shingles vaccine. Ask your GP if you are taking medication and have any questions.

Where can I get more information?

For more information talk to your practice nurse or GP, or call the NHS inform helpline on **0800 22 44 88** (textphone 18001 0800 22 44 88). The helpline is open every day 8 am to 10 pm and also provides an interpreting service.

You can report suspected side effects of vaccines and medicines through the Yellow Card Scheme. This can be done online by visiting **www.yellowcard.gov.uk** or by calling the Yellow Card hotline on **0808 100 3352** (available Monday to Friday – 10 am to 2 pm).

Visit **www.immunisationscotland.org.uk**

This publication is available online at **www.healthscotland.com** or telephone **0131 536 5500**.

Traditional Chinese

您也可以登入 **www.healthscotland.com** 瀏覽本刊物，或撥打 **0131 536 5500** 查詢。

Polish

Ta publikacja jest dostępna online na stronie **www.healthscotland.com** lub pod numerem telefonu **0131 536 5500**, gdzie można także zgłaszać wszelkie zapytania.

Urdu

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یا کسی سوالات کے لیے **0131 536 5500** پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔

This resource is available in Urdu, Chinese and Polish, and in an Easy Read format. NHS Health Scotland is happy to consider requests for other languages and formats.

Please contact **0131 536 5500** or email **nhs.healthscotland-alternativeformats@nhs.net**

This information is also available at **www.immunisationscotland.org.uk**

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