

Shingles vaccination for those aged 70 to 79

Copied from NHS Wales Leaflet



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, mental health problems 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. 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.

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? Side effects 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.