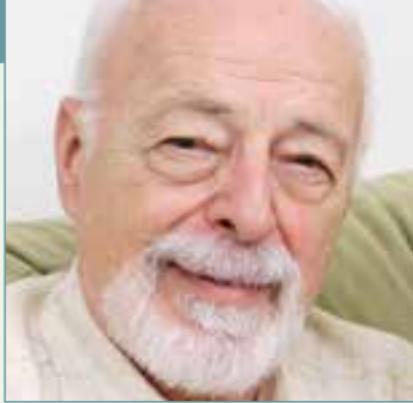


**Aged 70 or 78?**

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



Public Health  
Agency

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

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.



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 if you are 70 or 78 years old on 1 September 2020. If you are 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78 or 79 on 1 September 2020 and have not yet had the shingles vaccine, you can also have it now.**

## *How common is shingles?*

About one in five people who have had chickenpox develop shingles. Every year in Northern Ireland, around 1,000 people in their seventies will get shingles. Of these, about 200 go on to develop PHN.

## *How effective is the vaccination?*

By having the vaccination you will significantly reduce your chance of developing shingles. In fact, in the first three years since the vaccine was introduced there have been approximately 35% less consultations for shingles and 50% less consultations for PHN. 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 four years of the shingles vaccination programme more than 2.3 million people were vaccinated in England.



## ***Who will get the vaccine?***

Those aged 70 or 78 years of age on 1 September 2020 are eligible for the vaccine.

This year, the vaccine is also available for those previously eligible but who missed immunisation. This includes anyone aged 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77 or 79 on 1 September 2020. From 2021 onwards people aged 71-79 will no longer be eligible for the shingles vaccine. From 1 September 2021 onward it will only be available to people aged 70 on 1 September each year.

## ***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 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?***

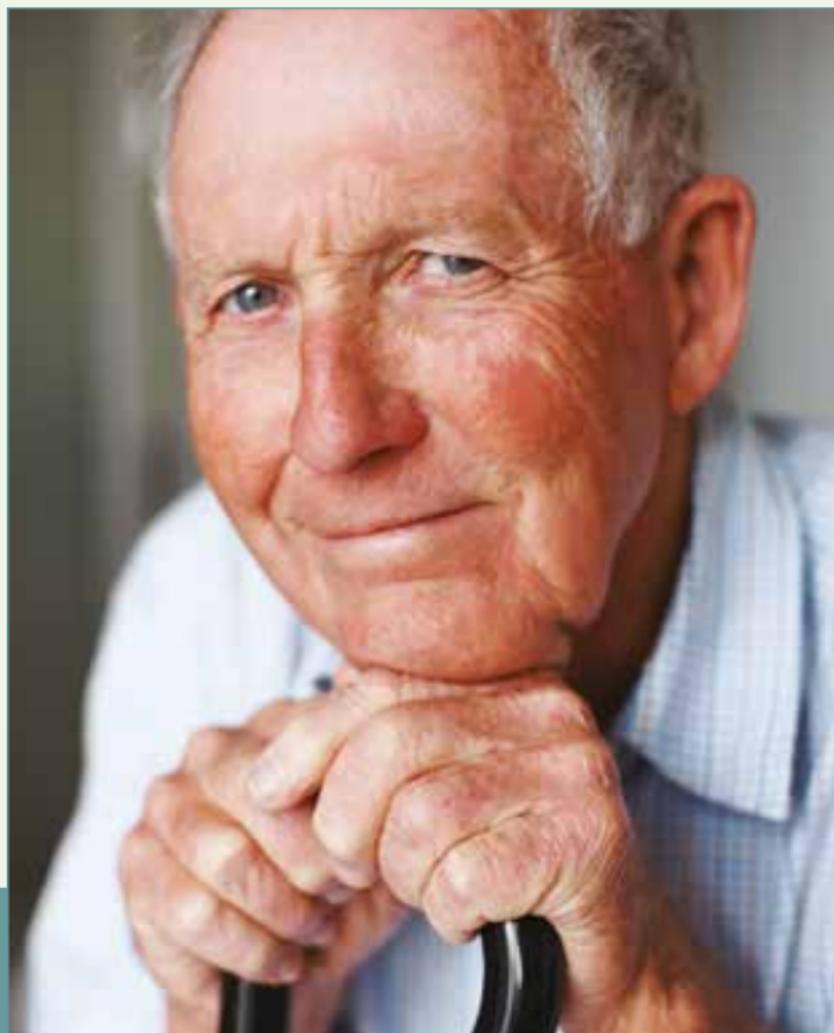
Yes, if you are eligible, contact your GP practice to make an appointment to have your vaccination.

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

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.

## *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 ~~from~~ if you get it before 31 August 2021. After that only those people aged 70 on 1 September each year will be eligible for the vaccine up until 31 August of the following year. Please contact your GP practice to make an appointment. It's important that you do not leave it too late to have the vaccination.

### ***Further information***

Speak to your GP or practice nurse, or go to [www.publichealth.hscni.net](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net) for more information.

For more information about the shingles vaccine Zostavax® visit  
[medicines.org.uk/emc/product/6101/pil](http://medicines.org.uk/emc/product/6101/pil)

**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 or 31 August 2021 (whichever is sooner).**

## *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 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 USA 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.



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