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## Shingles vaccine (Zostavax, Shingrix)

Zostavax® or Shingrix® are given as part of a vaccine immunisation programme to protect against shingles.

The vaccine will be injected under your skin or into the muscle of your upper arm.

The most common side-effects are tenderness at the site of the injection and headache. These should soon pass.

### About shingles vaccine

Type of medicine	Herpes zoster vaccine
Used for	Prevention of shingles (herpes zoster) in people over 50 years of age and people over the age of 18 at higher risk of developing shingles
Also called	Zostavax®, Shingrix®
Available as	Subcutaneous or intramuscular injection

**Shingles** is an infection of a nerve and the area of skin supplied by the nerve. It is caused by a virus called the varicella-zoster virus (this is the same virus that causes [chickenpox](#)). Shingles is sometimes called herpes zoster. The symptoms of shingles are a skin rash, blisters and pain. These occur in the areas of skin that the infected nerves supply. The pain may continue even after the rash and skin blisters have healed.

Shingles can occur at any age, but it is most common in people over the age of 50 years. A vaccine against the varicella-zoster virus has been shown to be effective in reducing the risk of older people developing shingles. In the UK from September 2013, a shingles vaccine immunisation programme was introduced for people aged 70 years to protect against herpes zoster. There is also a catch-up programme which offers the vaccine to anyone aged between 70 and 79 years who may have previously missed out on immunisation.

Zostavax® is a live vaccine which contains a weakened form of the varicella-zoster virus. Because of this it is not suitable for people with a weakened immune system. An inactivated vaccine called Shingrix®, which does not contain live virus, is now available for people with a weakened immune system.

From 1st September 2023 everyone who is eligible for vaccination under the UK immunisation programme will receive two doses of Shingrix® vaccine, once central stocks of Zostavax® have been used up.

## **Before having shingles vaccine**

Some medicines are not suitable for people with certain conditions, and sometimes a medicine may only be used if extra care is taken. For these reasons, before having shingles vaccine make sure your doctor or pharmacist knows:

- If you feel unwell or have a high temperature.
- If you have been told you have a weakened immune system. This may be a result of an illness or taking other medicines.
- If you have ever had an allergic reaction to a medicine.
- If you are taking any other medicines. This includes any medicines you are taking which are available to buy without a prescription, as well as herbal and complementary medicines.
- If you could be pregnant or are planning to become pregnant.

## How shingles vaccine is given

- Before you are given this treatment, ask to read the manufacturer's printed information leaflet from inside the pack. The leaflet will give you more information about the vaccine and a full list of side-effects which you may experience from having it.
- You will be given two doses of Shingrix® vaccine by your doctor or nurse. They will be given between eight weeks and 12 months apart, depending on your immune status. The vaccine is injected just underneath your skin or into a muscle, usually in your upper arm.
- If Zostavax® is used to vaccinate against shingles, only one dose is needed.

## Can shingles vaccine cause problems?

Along with their useful effects, all medicines can cause unwanted side-effects although not everyone experiences them. Speak with your doctor or pharmacist if any of the following side-effects continue or become troublesome.

<b>Very common Zostavax® side-effects (these affect more than 1 in 10 people)</b>	<b>What can I do if I experience this?</b>
Pain, redness, swelling, or itching at the site of the injection	This should soon pass
<b>Common Zostavax® side-effects (these affect fewer than 1 in 10 people)</b>	
Headache, joint pain or muscle pain	Drink plenty of water. If troublesome, take a dose of a suitable painkiller
High temperature (fever), skin rash	Drink plenty of water and ask a pharmacist to recommend suitable remedies. Talk to your doctor if you develop a blistering rash
<b>Very common Shingrix® side-effects (these affect more than 1 in 10 people)</b>	<b>What can I do if I experience this?</b>
Pain, redness, swelling, or itching at the site of the injection	This should soon pass
Feeling sick (nausea), being sick (vomiting), diarrhoea, tummy (abdominal) pain	Stick to simple meals - avoid spicy foods. Drink plenty of water to replace lost fluids
Headache, a high temperature (fever), chills, tiredness, muscle pain	Drink plenty of water. If troublesome, take a dose of a suitable painkiller

**Important:** Zostavax® is a live vaccine, which means that a small amount of live virus could be present in your body and be passed on to other people. This is especially true if you develop a blistering rash within four to six weeks of having the vaccine. Try to keep away from pregnant women and people who you know are at risk from infection, especially if you develop blisters.

If you experience any other symptoms which you think may be due to this vaccine, speak with your doctor or pharmacist.

## How to store shingles vaccine

- It is unlikely that you will be asked to store the vaccine before it is given to you. If, however, this does happen, keep it refrigerated until it is needed.
- Keep all medicines out of the reach and sight of children.
- Store in a cool, dry place, away from direct heat and light.

## Important information about all medicines

If you are having an operation or any dental treatment, tell the person carrying out the treatment which medicines you are taking.

If you have any questions about this medicine ask your doctor or nurse.

If you experience side effects, you can report them online through the [Yellow Card website](#).

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## Further reading

- [Manufacturer's PIL, Zostavax®](#); Merck Sharp and Dohme Limited, The electronic Medicines Compendium. Dated July 2022.
- [Medicines Complete BNF 87th Edition](#); British Medical Association and Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, London.
- [Manufacturer's PIL, Shingrix® powder and suspension for injection, Herpes zoster vaccine \(recombinant, adjuvanted\)](#); GlaxoSmithKline UK Ltd, The electronic Medicines Compendium. Dated September 2021.

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