

Press release: Shingles vaccine programme reduces cases and chronic complications

First evidence of the shingles vaccine programme shows a substantial reduction in cases and long-term complications.

A new study in the [Lancet Journal of Public Health](#) shows a substantial decrease in shingles cases and associated complications in the first 3 years since the introduction of the shingles vaccination programme by Public Health England (PHE).

Despite these very positive results, uptake of the vaccine has declined, with a 13% decline in people aged 70 since the start of the programme and an 8.4% decline in people aged 78 years since 2014.

PHE is urging adults aged 70 and 78 to protect themselves by taking up the offer for vaccination from their GP or booking an appointment if they missed out. Shingles is a painful condition and can be especially debilitating for older people.

The new analysis of the shingles vaccine programme, which was introduced in England in September 2013, estimated that the vaccine was 62% effective against shingles and between 70 to 88% effective against post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN), or long term pain, which is one of the main complications associated with shingles.

The study estimated that GP visits for shingles and PHN reduced by 35% and 50% respectively, in those aged 70 during 2013 to 2016.

An estimated 17,000 GP visits for shingles were avoided amongst the 5.5 million individuals who were given the vaccination in the first 3 years of the programme across England.

Dr Mary Ramsay, Head of Immunisations at PHE, said:

I encourage all those who are 70 and 78 to make an appointment with their GP practice to get the shingles vaccine, as well as those under 80 who previously missed out. It's the best way to avoid this very nasty disease and the long-term complications that can develop from having it.

Our population is aging and the risk from getting shingles and complications is higher as you get older. Immunisation is the best way to protect yourself from this painful, sometimes debilitating condition. Taking up the vaccine is an important part of staying healthy as you age.

Shingles is characterised by a skin rash on one side of the body resulting from reactivation of chicken pox virus that has been lying dormant in the body. It can last on average for 2 to 4 weeks and be significantly debilitating, causing loss of sleep and interference with day-to-day activities. Symptoms can include sharp stabbing pain and burning of the skin in the affected area, feeling unwell, a bad headache and a fever.

Over 50,000 cases of shingles occur in people aged 70 years and over each year in England and Wales, with approximately 50 cases being fatal.

The likelihood of getting shingles increases with age and adults aged 70 and above are more at risk of developing serious complications from it, such as PHN, a severe nerve pain that lasts for several months or more after the rash has gone.

Though many recover from PHN, symptoms can last for years or can become permanent. It is therefore vital for every individual eligible to get their vaccine.

In England, the shingles vaccination programme now targets adults aged 70 and 78 with a catch up programme for those aged 71 to 79.

PHE is encouraging healthcare professionals and the public to be aware of the complications surrounding shingles and to encourage those within the eligible groups to get vaccinated.

1. Those who are eligible for the free shingles vaccine include people in their 70s who were born after 1 September 1942 and people aged 79 years.
2. To get your vaccine, contact your GP or pharmacist for more information. If you are within the eligible group, your doctor will recommend the shingles vaccine during general GP visits or your annual flu appointment. Further details on the [shingles vaccination programme](#) are available on NHS Choices.
3. PHE's [shingles eligibility calculator](#) can help determine whether or not you are eligible for the vaccine.