

## SHINGLES INFECTION AND VACCINATION

### How does shingles affect me?

- Shingles is a viral infection that causes a painful rash of fluid-filled blisters on one side of the face or body. It usually looks like a single band of blisters.
- It is caused when the virus that causes chickenpox becomes active again
- Although shingles usually goes away after around 15 days, a common complication of shingles is nerve pain at the site of the rash, which can last for more than 3 months. This pain can have a severe effect on the quality of life and is difficult to treat.
- Shingles can sometimes affect the eye, and can lead to blindness
- Around 20-30% of people will have shingles in their lifetime – most after the age of 50 years old. Around 50% of people who live to 85 years will develop shingles.
- Older people, especially those over 70 years old, are more likely to experience ongoing severe pain after shingles. 10% of people aged 50-59 years and 20% of people aged 80 years and over will experience debilitating nerve pain after shingles.

### How does the shingles vaccine help?

- Vaccination is highly effective in preventing shingles
- It prevents 91% of adults aged 70 years and older from developing shingles, and prevents 89% of those who develop shingles from getting the severe nerve pain<sup>1</sup>

### What are the different shingles vaccines?

- There are 2 different brands of shingles vaccines – Shingrix and Zostavax
- Zostavax was the vaccine available earlier but has now been replaced by Shingrix (Zostavax is no longer available)
- Shingrix is more effective and protects for a longer time than Zostavax. Shingrix can also be used for people with weak immune systems

### When can I get the Shingrix vaccine?

- 2 doses of Shingrix should be given (the second dose given 2-6 months after the first dose) to:
  - Non-Indigenous adults 65 years old and older
  - Indigenous adults 50 years and older

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<sup>1</sup> [Zoster \(herpes zoster\) | The Australian Immunisation Handbook \(health.gov.au\)](#)

### **What are common side effects of the Shingrix vaccine?**

- 8 in 10 people will have swelling, redness or pain at the injection site
- 6 in 10 people also have fever, tiredness, nausea/vomiting, headache, shivering or muscle pain
- These side effects will go away by themselves after 2 - 3 days
- Paracetamol can help with injection site discomfort, fever, headache or muscle pain

### **Should I get the Shingrix vaccine if I was given Zostavax previously?**

- People who received Zostavax are recommended to receive Shingrix for more effective and longer-lasting protection
- You need to wait at least 12 months after the dose of Zostavax before receiving Shingrix (and you will still need the 2 doses of Shingrix)
- If you received a dose of Zostavax for free, you need to wait 5 years from when you had Zostavax to get your first dose of Shingrix for free. If you wish to pay for Shingrix yourself, you only need to wait 12 months.

### **Should I get the Shingrix vaccine if I have already had shingles?**

- Yes, you should still get the vaccine as there is a risk you may have another episode of shingles (1-5% risk, higher if you have a weak immune system)
- Wait at least 12 months after the infection before you get the vaccine

### **Should I get the Shingrix vaccine if I have never had chickenpox?**

- Most Australians will have had chickenpox by the time they are 30 years old even if they cannot remember having the infection.
- It is safe and recommended that you get the shingles vaccine even if you cannot remember having chickenpox.

### **Where can I get more information?**

[Zoster \(shingles\) vaccines \(Shingrix® \[RZV\] and Zostavax® \[ZVL\]\) – frequently asked questions | NCIRS](#)