

# Shingles Vaccination - Zostavax

## For the over 60s

Shingles is a skin rash, caused by the same Herpes Zoster Virus that is responsible for chickenpox

It causes painful blistering around or across the body

Shingles occurs because of a reactivation of the chickenpox virus

Sometimes, the pain doesn't go away once the shingles rash has cleared

This complication is called post-herpetic neuralgia and is more common when the shingles rash appeared on the face rather than the body

It is also more common and more persistently troublesome in the elderly

### Zostavax

- is recommended for use in people 60 years old and older, to protect people against shingles and post-herpetic neuralgia
- reduces the risk of shingles by 50% and the risk of post-herpetic neuralgia by 65%
- is effective for at least six years, but may last much longer
- is most effective in people 60-69 years old, but also provides some protection for older age groups
- will not protect people against other forms of herpes such as genital herpes
- is not recommended to treat active shingles or post-herpetic neuralgia once it develops

The National Health and Medical Research Council advises:

- **A single dose of zoster vaccine is recommended for adults 60-79 years of age** who have not previously received a dose of zoster vaccine. Serologic testing prior to receipt of zoster vaccine is not indicated and it is not necessary to elicit a history of previous varicella (chickenpox) infection
- **People with chronic medical conditions can receive zoster vaccine**
- **People with significantly impaired immunity should not receive zoster vaccine**
  - *A person who has ever had a life-threatening or severe allergic reaction to gelatin, the antibiotic neomycin, or any other component of shingles vaccine*
  - *Tell your doctor if you have any severe allergies.*
  - *A person who has a weakened immune system because of*
    - *HIV/AIDS or another disease that affects the immune system,*
    - *treatment with drugs that affect the immune system, such as steroids,*
    - *cancer treatment such as radiation or chemotherapy,*
    - *a history of cancer affecting the bone marrow or lymphatic system, such as leukemia or lymphoma.*
  - *Women who are or might be pregnant*
- Zoster vaccination is not recommended for use in people less than 50 years of age and is not registered for use in this age group.
- Zoster vaccination may be less likely to provide a clinical benefit in people aged older than 80 years
- Zoster vaccine may be given to persons with a history of a previous episode of Herpes Zoster (shingles). It is possible that a history of previous zoster may be inaccurate or a mistaken diagnosis. In addition, the risk of a repeat episode of zoster has been estimated at approximately 5% in immunocompetent persons. It is suggested that the vaccine could be given at least 1 year after the episode of HZ.

- Zoster vaccination is not recommended for persons previously vaccinated with varicella (chickenpox) vaccine
- There are further specific recommendations for special categories such as
  - persons immunocompromised due to HIV/AIDS,
  - persons anticipating future significant immunocompromised,
  - household contacts of persons who are immunocompromised,

### **Adverse reactions**

- No serious problems have been identified with shingles vaccine.
- The vaccine has been tested in about 20,000 people aged 60 years old and older. The most common side effects in people who got the vaccine were redness, soreness, swelling or itching at the shot site, and headache. CDC, working with the FDA, will continue to monitor the safety of the vaccine after it is in general use.
- It is safe to be around infants and young children, pregnant women, or people with weakened immune systems after you get the shingles vaccine. There is no documentation of a person getting chickenpox from someone who has received the shingles vaccine (which contains varicella zoster virus).
- Some people who get the shingles vaccine will develop a chickenpox-like rash near the place where they were vaccinated. As a precaution, this rash should be covered until it disappears.
- The shingles vaccine does not contain thimerosal (a preservative containing mercury).

### **Zostavax**

- is available for approximately \$210 (+ nursing administration fee) per dose, GST not applicable
- is not currently funded by Government or Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.
- may be funded by Department of Veteran Affairs for \$5 for eligible card-holders upon individual application by your Doctor
- may attract a rebate from Private Health Insurance Extras

**So all adults aged 60 to 79 should consider a single dose of Zostavax**  
**Please discuss Zostavax for the 60s and over with your Doctor**