

## Vaccine for Shingles

Shingles is a rash caused by the virus which causes chickenpox (varicella zoster). The virus lies dormant in the spine after a chickenpox infection and may be re-activated later in life. Although in the majority of people this rash is uncomfortable, it can in some (especially the more elderly) be more severe and also result in a painful and debilitating chronic pain known as Post-Herpetic Neuralgia (PHN).

1 in 4 people will have an episode of shingles in their lifetime. The incidence and severity of shingles increase with age. Up to 1 in 5 cases of shingles will develop severe and long-lasting PHN.

The results of the Shingles Prevention Study, which involved more than 38,000 adults aged 60 and over showed that vaccination with Zostavax, made by Sanofi Pasteur MSD, prevented shingles by 51%; prevented shingles cases with severe pain by 73%; reduced the incidence of PHN by 67%; and reduced pain and discomfort by 61%.

The vaccine is not available on the NHS and, when it is planned for introduction in 2014, it will be limited to patients over 70 years old.

The vaccine is available for £180.

Further info:

Zostavax is a live vaccine.

It is used to prevent, not to treat, shingles and PHN.

One dose is required, subcutaneous, upper arm.

Side effects: most frequent were headache and injection site reactions.

Cautions: those in contact with pregnant women who have not had chickenpox, or with people with immune deficiency states.

It cannot be used during an attack of shingles.

Contra-indications: neomycin allergy. Immune deficiency including steroid treatment.

There is no insufficient data to justify giving the vaccine to people less than 50 years old.