NHS

A guide to vaccinations for

adults over 65

Help protect yourself from infectious diseases so you can get on with what you love best.



immunisation

the safest way to protect your health

Having your vaccines as an older adult helps to protect you from infectious diseases so you can get on with what you love best.

This leaflet is a guide to the vaccines you are offered and when.

You should be invited by your GP to have your vaccines when you become eligible. Some vaccines, for example flu, may also be available from community pharmacies. It is important to have them when you are offered, as this is the best time for you to get protection.



Vaccines help your body develop antibodies to protect you.

Vaccines for those aged over 65 years

Vaccine to protect against	How often	How
Flu	Every flu season for those 65 years and over	One injection each year
Pneumococcal	Once as you turn 65	One injection unless your GP or consultant recommends a second dose
Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)	Once as you turn 75 (or earlier if you take up residence in a care home for older adults or you are aged 65 to 74 years and are immunosuppressed or have a chronic respiratory disease (not well-controlled asthma))	One injection
Shingles	Once you turn 65 or 70	Two injections, 6 to 12 months apart
	If you are severely immunosuppressed and are aged 18 years or older	Two injections, 8 weeks to 6 months apart
COVID-19	In spring and autumn if you are in a risk group, and are over 75 or live in a care home	One injection twice a year

Vaccinations provide the best protection against these diseases, but it will take around 2 weeks or more for this protection to develop. Many healthy people develop a good level of immunity to vaccines but if you have a health condition or are immunocompromised, your body may not respond as well. However, the vaccine may still be of benefit to you. You may be offered more doses of vaccine over time to maintain your levels of protection. Your healthcare professional should discuss this with you.

Pneumococcal vaccine (PCV20)

The pneumococcal vaccine helps protect against serious illnesses like pneumonia and meningitis. It's recommended for people at higher risk of these illnesses.

Who is offered the pneumococcal vaccine?

At 65 years of age everyone is offered a single dose of pneumococcal vaccine. Children and adults with certain underlying medical conditions are also offered once dose of vaccine. From 1 October 2026, people experiencing homelessness (PEH), defined as rough sleepers, and those using homeless hostels or night shelters, or sleeping in vans and tents are eligible for pneumococcal vaccination.

What the pneumococcal vaccine is for

Pneumococcal infections can be transmitted from coughs and sneezes and are more common each winter. The pneumococcal vaccine helps protect against some types of bacterial infections that can cause serious illnesses like:

- **meningitis** (an infection in the brain and spinal cord)
- **sepsis** (a life-threatening reaction to an infection)
- **pneumonia** (an infection in the lungs)

It can also help protect against other illnesses such as sinusitis and ear infections.

How well the pneumococcal vaccine works and how long it lasts

Vaccination gives the best protection against pneumococcal infections. PCV20 helps protect against pneumonia and invasive

pneumococcal disease caused by the most common pneumococcal strains but does not protect against all pneumococcal strains. So, there's still a chance you might get a pneumococcal infection. You usually have some protection by about 3 weeks from when you had the vaccine.

Who cannot have the pneumococcal vaccine

Most people can have the pneumococcal vaccine if they need it, if they are eligible. You cannot have the vaccine if you've had a serious allergic reaction **(anaphylaxis)** to a previous dose of the vaccine or an ingredient in the vaccine.

Side effects of the pneumococcal vaccine

Like all medicines, the pneumococcal vaccine can cause side effects, but not everyone gets them.

Common side effects

The most common side effects of the pneumococcal vaccine include:

- swelling or pain where the injection was given
- a high temperature
- feeling tired
- loss of appetite

You will be offered Prevenar 20, sometimes referred to as PCV20: **www.medicines.org.uk/emc/files/pil.13461.pdf**.

See back of guide for details on reporting side effects to the Yellow Card scheme.

Vaccine safety

Like all licensed vaccines, the pneumococcal vaccine has been thoroughly tested and meets strict UK safety and licensing requirements.

Flu

Everyone aged 65 years and over is recommended to have the flu vaccine every year. This is because as you get older you are less able to fight off infections and flu can lead to serious complications.

What is flu?

Flu is not just a heavy cold. Flu occurs every year, usually in the winter, which is why it's sometimes called seasonal flu. It's a highly infectious disease with symptoms that come on very quickly. Colds are much less serious and usually start gradually with a stuffy or runny nose and a sore throat. A bad bout of flu can be much worse than a heavy cold.

The most common symptoms of flu are fever, chills, headache, aching muscles and joints, stuffy nose, dry cough, sore throat, and extreme tiredness. Healthy individuals usually recover within 2 to 7 days, but for some the disease can lead to hospitalisation, permanent disability or even death.

Some people, such as older adults, are more susceptible to the effects of flu. For them, it can increase the risk of developing more serious illnesses such as bronchitis and pneumonia, or can make existing conditions worse.

How to get the flu vaccine

For advice and information about flu vaccination, speak to your GP, practice nurse or pharmacist.

It is best to have your flu vaccination in the autumn or early winter before flu rates increase.

It is best to have your flu vaccination in the autumn or early winter before flu rates increase. Remember that you need it every year, so don't assume you are protected because you had one last year.

Visit **www.nhs.uk/flujab** for **information on whether you are eligible.**

The causes of flu

Flu is caused by influenza viruses that infect the windpipe and lungs. And because it's caused by viruses and not bacteria, antibiotics won't treat it. However, if there are complications from getting flu, antibiotics may be needed.



Is the vaccine needed every year?

Yes; the flu viruses can change from one winter to the next. Flu vaccines are updated for each winter to give protection against the strains of flu that are most likely to be going around. For this reason, we strongly recommend that even if you were vaccinated last year, you should be vaccinated again this year. Also, protection from flu vaccination goes down with time so even if some of the strains are the same you should have a flu vaccine again each flu season.

Side effects of the vaccine

Those having an injected vaccine may get a sore arm at the site of the injection, a mild fever and aching muscles for a day or two after the vaccination.

Serious side effects from the flu vaccine are uncommon.

People who shouldn't have the flu vaccination

Almost everybody can have the vaccine, but you should not be vaccinated if you have ever had a serious allergy to the vaccine, or any of its ingredients. If you are unsure whether you can have the vaccine, check with your GP. If you have a fever, the vaccination may be delayed until you are better.



Vaccine safety

Like all licensed vaccines, the flu vaccines have been thoroughly tested and meet strict UK safety and licensing requirements. You will be offered the right one for you.

Shingles

The vaccine for the shingles programme is called Shingrix. You will need 2 doses of Shingrix for the best protection. Your GP practice will contact you once you are eligible.

Unlike most other infections, you don't catch shingles from someone else. Most of us had chickenpox when we were young, although some of us will not be aware that we've had it. After you have chickenpox, the virus remains dormant living in the nerves. For most of your life, you will not be aware of this, but from time to time the virus can come back and spread to the skin causing a disease called shingles.

Shingles can be very painful and tends to affect people more commonly as they get older. This can be because your immune system is weakened by increasing age, by stress or by a range of medical conditions and treatments.



Shingles can really affect your life, stopping you from doing all the things you usually enjoy.

For some, the pain caused by shingles can last for many years.

Cause and symptoms of shingles

Shingles (also known as herpes zoster) is caused by the dormant chickenpox virus spreading to an area of skin served by one of the nerves. It results in clusters of extremely painful and itchy fluid-filled blisters. These blisters can burst and turn into sores that eventually crust over and heal. These blisters usually affect an area on one side of the body, most commonly the chest, but sometimes also the head, face and eye.

How long shingles lasts and how serious it can be

The first signs of shingles can be feeling generally unwell with a tingling or burning feeling in an area of skin on one side of the body. A painful rash with fluid-filled blisters usually appears a few days after the initial symptoms.

Shingles on the body can cause severe pain. If shingles develops in the eye and eyelid, it can lead to decreased vision or even permanent blindness in that eye.

Incidence of shingles

About 1 in 5 people who have had chickenpox will develop shingles. This means that every year in England and Wales, tens of thousands of people will have shingles. Although shingles can occur at any age, the risk, severity and the complications of shingles all increase with age.

Post-herpetic neuralgia

Each year, about 14,000 people go on to develop post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN) after shingles and over 1,400 are admitted to hospital because of PHN.

Most people recover fully after a few weeks, but for some, the pain goes on for several months or even years – this is called PHN. This is a particularly unpleasant condition with severe burning, throbbing or stabbing nerve pain.

The older you are, the more likely you are to have long-lasting pain. The shingles vaccine reduces the risk of getting shingles and PHN.

How shingles spreads

Shingles does not spread as easily as chickenpox, but the fluid in the blisters does contain the chickenpox virus. So someone who is not immune to chickenpox can catch the infection if they are in contact with this fluid.

If you have a shingles rash you should cover the rash with loose clothing to reduce the risk of spreading chickenpox. Pregnant women who have not had chickenpox, people with a weakened immune system and newborn babies should avoid direct contact with the rash.

Who will be offered the shingles vaccine

Since 1 September 2023, the vaccine is offered to the following:

- healthy people aged 70 to 79 years who have not yet been vaccinated
- healthy people when they turn 65 or 70 years
- people aged 18 years and over with a severely weakened immune system

You will remain eligible for the shingles vaccine until your 80th birthday, unless you have a weakened immune system; people with a severely weakened immune system remain eligible for vaccine. The sooner you have the vaccine, the earlier you will be protected.

If you have a shingles vaccine you will be given a record card with your name and the date of the next appointment. Please keep it in a safe place.

Side effects

Side effects from Shingrix vaccines are usually quite mild and don't last very long. The most common side effects (occurring in at least one in every 10 people) are:

- pain and redness at the injection site
- general muscle aches
- headache

You may feel tired and have a fever after Shingrix vaccine. You can rest and take the normal dose of paracetamol (follow the advice in the packaging) to help make you feel better. Do not use machines or drive if you are feeling unwell. You should feel better after a few days but if your symptoms persist for longer, you should discuss these with your GP or practice nurse.



Vaccine safety

Like all licensed vaccines, the shingles vaccine has been thoroughly tested and meets strict UK safety and licensing requirements.

It has been used extensively in Europe and North America for the last few years.

Effectiveness of the vaccination

By having the vaccination you will significantly reduce your chance of developing shingles.

In the **first 5 years of the national shingles programme,** there were 40,500 fewer GP consultations for shingles-related disease and 1,840 fewer hospitalisations.

If you do go on to develop shingles, the symptoms are likely to be milder and the illness shorter than if you had not had the vaccination. The Shingrix vaccine used in the UK has been shown to provide good protection.

How and when the vaccine is given

Like most vaccinations, the vaccine will be given as an injection in your upper arm.

Shingrix is a non-live vaccine and you will need 2 doses to give you the best longer-lasting protection.

For most people the second dose of Shingrix will be offered from about 6 months after the first dose. If you have a severely weakened immune system your second dose of Shingrix should be given earlier, but at least 8 weeks after dose one.

Your GP practice will let you know when to book for the second dose.

Eligibility for the vaccine

When you become eligible for your shingles vaccine, your GP surgery will contact you to book an appointment. However, if you are worried about shingles, you should contact your GP surgery for advice.

People who shouldn't have the vaccine

If you've had a severe reaction to any of the substances that go into the vaccine, you might not be able to have it. Your GP practice will advise you.

Missing your vaccination

For most people, the shingles vaccine will be offered until they are aged 80 years. However, if you have a severely weakened immune system, the vaccine can be given up to any age.

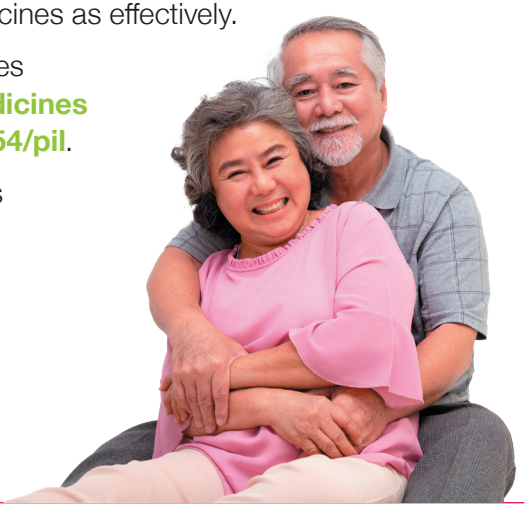
For the best protection you should have the vaccine or complete the course at the recommended time. Contact your GP practice to make another appointment.

Why the vaccine is not offered to those 80 years and older

As you become older, there is less evidence your body responds to some vaccines as effectively.

Read more about the shingles vaccine Shingrix: **www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/12054/pil**.

See back of guide for details on reporting side effects.



Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

RSV is an infectious disease of the airways and lungs. RSV infection often causes symptoms similar to a cold, including:

- cough
- sore throat
- sneezing
- a runny or blocked nose

It can also make you become wheezy or short of breath and lead to pneumonia and other life-threatening conditions. There is no specific treatment, and most infections will get better by themselves. Every year thousands of older adults need hospital care for RSV, and some of them will die. RSV can be more severe in people with medical conditions such as heart or lung disease or a weakened immune system.

How RSV is spread

RSV infections can occur all year round but cases peak every winter. RSV can spread through coughs and sneezes. You can help to prevent the spread of the virus by covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze (ideally with a tissue, or else into the bend of your elbow), and you can wash your hands frequently to reduce the risk of picking up the virus. Even with these measures it can be difficult to avoid RSV infection. The best way to protect yourself is to have the vaccine.

How the RSV vaccine works

Almost all older adults will have had several RSV infections during their life. A single dose of vaccine will help to boost protection as you reach an age group at highest risk of serious RSV infection. Unlike the flu vaccine you do not need to have the RSV vaccine every year.

Who is offered the RSV vaccine?

The RSV vaccine is offered to:

- everyone age 75 years and older. This is because older adults are more at risk of serious complications from RSV. There is no upper age limit
- people aged 65 to 74 who have a weakened immune system or have a long term lung condition (not including asthma that is under control)
- people living in care homes for older adults. This is because of the risk of serious RSV outbreaks. Most residents will already be eligible because of their age, but adults younger than 75 but living in a care home for older adults are also eligible

These groups are all at higher risk of serious complications from RSV. A UK study found that people with well-controlled asthma were at much lower risk than people with other lung conditions.

Those who should not have the RSV vaccine

Almost everybody can have the vaccine, but tell the doctor or nurse if you have ever had a serious allergy to a vaccine, or any of the ingredients. You can read the patient information leaflet for the RSV vaccine called **Abrysvo.** If you have a minor illness such as a cold you can receive the vaccine, but if you are very unwell or have a fever, the doctor or nurse may advise you to wait until you are better.

How long the RSV vaccine will protect you for

In the clinical studies, RSV vaccine provided good protection for at least 2 years and is expected to last longer.

Side effects from the RSV vaccine

You may get some soreness, redness or swelling at the site of the injection for a day or two after the vaccination. Over 12 million doses have been given to older adults in the USA and UK. A rare, but serious, nervous system condition known as Guillain-Barré syndrome that leads to weakness was reported, around 1 case for every 40,000 to 100,000 doses given, in the 6 weeks after vaccination. The same condition also occurs after a number of common infections and some vaccines. If you have symptoms such as tingling, numbness, weakness, sharp pain or pins and needles in your hands, feet, arms or legs, you should seek immediate medical attention. Overall it is safer for you to have the vaccine than to risk having a potentially serious RSV infection.

The RSV vaccine is called Abrysvo: **www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/15309/pil#about-medicine**. See back of guide for details on reporting side effects.

Vaccine safety

Like all licensed vaccines, the RSV vaccine has been thoroughly tested and meets strict UK safety and licensing requirements.



COVID-19 vaccines

You may be offered a COVID-19 vaccine seasonally. Your GP, practice nurse or clinician will let you know if you are eligible and if you can have your COVID-19 vaccine at the same time as other vaccinations.

The criteria for the COVID-19 vaccine are under regular review and can change over time, please see **www.gov.uk/government/collections/covid-19-vaccination-programme** for the most up-to-date information.



Co-administration of vaccines

	RSV	PCV	Shingles	Flu	COVID-19
RSV	–	✓	✓	In specific clinical circumstances	✓
PCV	✓	–	✓	✓	✓
Shingles	✓	✓	–	✓	✓
Flu	In specific clinical circumstances	✓	✓	–	✓
COVID-19	✓	✓	✓	✓	–

You may be offered your vaccinations for RSV, PCV20 and shingles or a combination of these vaccines at the same appointment. This is very safe and will help you to get protected against these diseases in a timely manner. If you are immunised during the flu season you may also be offered a flu vaccination in combination with other vaccines.

Reporting side effects

You can report suspected side effects to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA):

on the Yellow Card website:
https://yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/

by calling the freephone line: 0800 731 6789
(9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)

by downloading the Yellow Card App on **iOS** or **Android**

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www.nhs.uk/vaccinations