OUR GP

Information for patients, families and carers

Shingles and the shingles vaccine

What shingles is, what to look out for, when to get help, and how the vaccine protects you.

What is shingles?

Shingles is a painful rash caused by the chickenpox virus waking up again. After you have had chickenpox, the virus stays asleep in your nerves for life. Years later, often when your body's defences are lower because of age, illness or some medicines, it can travel along one nerve and cause shingles. It usually affects **one side of the body or face only**, in a band or strip. You cannot catch shingles from someone else.

What you might notice

- Tingling, burning or stabbing pain in one area, a few days before any rash
- The rash follows a band, often around the chest, back or tummy, or on the face
- Headache, feeling tired or generally unwell, sometimes a temperature
- A red rash on one side that turns into small fluid-filled blisters
- Itching, or skin that hurts to touch, even from clothes or wind
- Blisters crust over in about 7 to 10 days; the rash usually clears in 2 to 4 weeks

When shingles needs extra care

Near the eye
Rash on the forehead, eyelid or tip of the nose can harm the eye. Get seen today.

Ear and face
Rash in or by the ear with a drooping face, dizziness or hearing loss.

Long-lasting pain
Nerve pain that lasts after the rash heals (post-herpetic neuralgia).

Weakened immune system
Shingles can be more severe or spread more widely. Get seen quickly.

Skin infection
Spreading redness, heat, pus or a new temperature can mean the blisters are infected.

Can others catch it?
Not shingles, but blisters can pass **chickenpox** to someone who never had it.

Who is more at risk

About 1 in 4 people get shingles. It is more likely if you:

are over 50, and more so over 70 | **have a weakened immune system** | **have chemotherapy or a transplant** | **take steroids or immune-suppressing medicines** | **have HIV** | **have lupus or rheumatoid arthritis** | **have diabetes**

Good news Shingles can be prevented. Two doses of the shingles vaccine (Shingrix) cut the risk by about 9 in 10. Book yours at OUR GP in Dundee: see over.

Please turn over: how to help, when to get help and the vaccine →

How you can help yourself or someone with shingles

Get seen early
Antiviral tablets work best started within 3 days of the rash.

Ease the pain
Paracetamol or ibuprofen if safe for you, a cool damp cloth, rest.

Keep it clean and dry
Don't scratch. Avoid antibiotic creams and sticky plasters.

Cover and wear loose
Loose cotton clothes; a loose cover on weeping blisters.

Protect others
Until blisters crust, avoid pregnant women, newborns and people with weak immunity.

Wash and don't share
Wash hands often. Don't share towels or clothes.

What the doctor will do

1. Look at the rash and check the eye, ear and face
2. Decide if antiviral tablets will help
3. Plan pain relief, including nerve pain medicines if needed
4. Arrange follow-up, and advise on the vaccine once you recover

Tell the GP when the pain and rash started, any eye or ear symptoms, if you are pregnant, and any medicines that affect your immune system.

The shingles vaccine (Shingrix)

How it works. Not a live vaccine, so it cannot give you shingles or chickenpox. Two injections in the upper arm, usually 2 to 6 months apart (8 weeks to 6 months if your immune system is weak).

Who can have it. Adults aged 50 and over, and adults 18 and over at higher risk, such as a weakened immune system or before starting immune-suppressing treatment.

Side effects. A sore arm, tiredness, aches, headache, chills or a temperature for 1 to 3 days are common. Serious allergic reactions are rare.

How well it works. In trials, two doses prevented about 97% of shingles in people aged 50 to 69 and 91% in those over 70. Protection stays strong for at least 10 years.

Book at OUR GP, Dundee. £250 per dose, £500 for the full course. A GP checks it suits you first. No referral needed.

Check first if you had a severe reaction to a previous dose, are unwell with a fever, are pregnant or breastfeeding, or had shingles recently (wait until it has settled).

Call 999 if

the person is very drowsy or confused, has a severe headache with a stiff neck, a fit, new weakness or slurred speech, or difficulty breathing.

Contact us the same day if

the rash is near the eye or on the nose, the eye is red, painful or vision changes; the face droops or the ear is affected; you have a weak immune system or are pregnant; the rash spreads widely; or pain is severe.

Getting better: most people recover fully in 2 to 4 weeks. If pain lasts after the rash heals, come back: nerve pain can be treated. Shingles can return, so the vaccine is still worth having.

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Based on UKHSA Green Book ch. 28a, NICE CKS, BMJ Best Practice and the Shingrix leaflet. October 2026.