

Shingles vaccine is associated with reduction in both postherpetic neuralgia and herpes zoster

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Shingles vaccine is associated with reduction in both postherpetic neuralgia and herpes zoster, but uptake in the US is low.

A vaccine to prevent shingles may reduce by half the occurrence of this painful skin and nerve infection in older people (aged over 65 years) and may also reduce the rate of a painful complication of shingles, postherpetic neuralgia, but has a very low uptake (only 4%) in [older adults](#) in the United States, according to a study by UK and US researchers published in this week's *PLOS Medicine*.

The researchers, led by Sinéad Langan from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, reached these conclusions by examining the records of 766,330 [Medicare beneficiaries](#) aged 65 years or more between 2007 and 2009.

They found that shingles vaccine uptake was extremely low—only 3.9% of participants were vaccinated—but was particularly low among black people (0.3%) and among people with a low income (0.6%).

Over the study period, almost 13,000 participants developed shingles and the vaccine reduced the rate of shingles by 48% (that is, approximately half as many [vaccinated individuals](#) developed shingles as those who were not vaccinated). However, the vaccine was less effective in older adults with impaired immune systems. The authors also found that

[vaccine effectiveness](#) against post-herpetic neuralgia was 59%.

The authors say: "Herpes zoster vaccination was associated with a significant reduction in incident herpes zoster and [post-herpetic neuralgia] in routine clinical use."

They continue: "Despite strong evidence supporting its effectiveness, clinical use remains disappointingly low with particularly low [vaccination rates](#) in particular patient groups."

The authors add: " The findings are relevant beyond US medical practice, being of major importance to the many countries, including the UK, that are actively considering introducing the zoster vaccine into routine practice in the near future."

More information: Langan SM, Smeeth L, Margolis DJ, Thomas SL (2013) Herpes Zoster Vaccine Effectiveness against Incident Herpes Zoster and Post-herpetic Neuralgia in an Older US Population: A Cohort Study. PLoS Med 10(4): e1001420. [doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1001420](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1001420)

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