

# New clinician resource available explains biological impact of aging on immunity

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The American College of Physicians (ACP), the American Pharmacists Association (APhA), and The Gerontological Society of America (GSA), representing 220,000 clinicians, today released "Aging and Immunity: The Important Role of Vaccines", a new resource highlighting the biological impact of aging on immunity.

Developed with support by GSK, the guidebook is designed to help [health care professionals](#) understand the biological impact of aging on immunity and reinforce the importance of adult immunization, especially for vaccine-preventable diseases such as shingles, pneumonia, and influenza. The guidebook also offers practical tips and strategies for supporting aging patients' [health](#) and overcoming barriers to vaccination.

## Age-related decline in immunity

"As we age, our immune system declines, making older adults more susceptible to serious conditions," said Jack Ende, MD, MACP, President, ACP. "Understanding the aging immune system is becoming increasingly important for clinicians because vaccination is an effective solution to overcoming some of this age-related decline in immunity."

Research has shown that one of the most important things health care professionals can do to support aging patients is to provide a strong recommendation for them to be vaccinated.

"At every opportunity, clinicians should recommend vaccination according to the schedule from the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, have a program that supports vaccine administration, or refer patients to a health care professional who administers vaccines, and document administration of vaccines," said Kelly Goode, PharmD, BCPS, FAPhA, Board of Trustees Member and Immediate Past President, APhA.

## **As individuals age, the chances of getting shingles increases**

"Aging and Immunity" details how cell-mediated immunity deteriorates as a person ages. For instance, in people who had chickenpox as children, deteriorating cell-mediated immunity is considered a factor for why latent varicella zoster virus commonly becomes reactivated in older adults, causing shingles. About one million cases of shingles are diagnosed in the United States every year. Shingles occurs in one in every three people in the United States, mostly adults over the age of 50. For those who live to age 85, one in every two people will contract shingles. The painful condition occurs in people who are healthy as well as people with chronic diseases or immunosuppression. Vaccination is an important way of reducing risk of getting [shingles](#) and its complications, like postherpetic neuralgia (PHN) and necessity of prescribing pain relievers.

"Shingles is an example of a disease that afflicts one million adults every year and costs the economy \$1 billion in health care expenses. It especially impacts [older adults](#) as a direct result of [age-related decline](#) in immunity," said James Appleby, BSPHarm, MPH, Executive Director and CEO, GSA. "Shingles can affect anyone who carries the [varicella zoster virus](#), and virtually all adults do, whether they had chickenpox during their childhood or not."

## Addressing barriers to vaccination

"Aging and Immunity" explains barriers to vaccination at the patient and practice levels and offers recommendations about how clinicians can overcome them. Strategies to improve vaccination rates include using standing orders, collaborating with other health care team members, identifying a staff vaccine champion in the practice, adding reminders to charts, and counseling patients about recommended vaccines.

"We recognize the critical role health care professionals play in educating patients about [vaccine](#)-preventable diseases," said Barbara Howe, M.D., Vice President and Director, North American Vaccine Development, GSK. "Our collaboration with ACP, APhA, and GSA reinforces our commitment to educating [health care](#) professionals and patients about the importance of vaccination throughout an individual's life."

**More information:** [www.acponline.org/system/files ...  
d\\_immunity\\_guide.pdf](http://www.acponline.org/system/files/...d_immunity_guide.pdf)

Provided by American College of Physicians

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