

# Shingles vaccine prevents painful disease in older adults

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Older adults who get the shingles vaccine have a nearly 50 percent reduced risk of developing the often debilitating disease, finds a new evidence review from *The Cochrane Library*.

[Shingles](#), which originates from the same virus as the childhood disease [chickenpox](#), can severely impact quality of life for weeks or months.

Lead study author, Anna Gagliardi, Ph.D., professor of geriatrics and gerontology at Federal University in Sao Paulo, Brazil, explained, "The herpes zoster disease is an extremely painful condition that impacts the quality of patients' lives. People over 60 are particularly susceptible to developing the disease, but fortunately nowadays we have a [vaccine](#) for it."

The shingles virus remains dormant in the nervous system of anyone who had chickenpox. Later in life, when the immune system is more compromised, the virus may reappear in the form of shingles, a painful inflammation of [sensory nerves](#).

The vaccine is more effective for those 60 to 69 years old compared with people 70 and older since

younger adults typically have a stronger immune system. However, those in their 60s may experience more frequent side effects from the vaccine.

Gagliardi noted, "Adults over 70 have less immunity reaction from the vaccine, but the vaccine works. In general, the vaccine is well tolerated and it produces few systemic adverse reactions and only a mild or moderate adverse reaction at the site of the vaccination."

Researchers analyzed the effectiveness of the zoster vaccine from eight [randomized controlled trials](#) that included 52,259 people in several European countries and the U.S. The principal study, the Shingles Prevention Study, followed 38,546 participants for at least 3 years and one month after being vaccinated.

Jonathan S. Anderson, M.D., internist with the Dean Health System in Madison, Wisconsin, said, "The meta-analysis confirms what we knew before and what we see in practice: that the zoster vaccine reduces the risk of developing shingles over subsequent years. Over the three years the study looked at the effects of the vaccine, the risk was cut in half. Fifty people would need to receive the vaccine for one person to benefit by not getting shingles. This is reasonable given that shingles is not only very painful, it can develop into a chronically painful condition which is often difficult to treat."

Anderson added, "While the results of the study weren't surprising it may provide some impetus to vaccinate people sooner when they are still in their 60s instead of waiting and continuing to discuss it with patients over time."

**More information:** Gagliardi AMZ, Gomes Silva BN, TorloniMR, Soares BGO. Vaccines for preventing herpes zoster in older adults. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2012, Issue 10.

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