

5 September 2017

News release

People in their 70s in the South West urged to take up shingles vaccine offer

People in their 70s in the South West are being urged to protect themselves against shingles with a free vaccine.

Local GP practices are writing to eligible patients to offer them the vaccination as part of the NHS shingles immunisation campaign for 2017/18, which begins on 1 September 2017.

By the end of March 2017, 28,817 eligible elderly people across the South West were at risk of developing Shingles due to not being vaccinated, but the NHS is encouraging everyone who is offered the vaccine to take it up.

Dr Julie Yates, Consultant in Public Health and Screening and Immunisation Lead in the South West said:

“Shingles is caused by the same virus that causes chickenpox, but you don’t catch shingles from chickenpox. After you have had chickenpox, often as a child, the virus does not go away but instead lies dormant in the nervous system and can reactivate later when the immune system is weakened. This reactivation is called shingles.

“As people get older their immune system naturally weakens which is why those aged 70 and over are more likely to get shingles. Shingles can be very painful and debilitating and because it reactivates in the nervous system, it can lead to nerve pain and other health problems long after the initial rash has disappeared.

“Complications of shingles can also be fatal for around 1 in 1,000 over-70s who develop the illness which is why it is so important that eligible patients take up the offer from their GP surgery and get vaccinated against the virus.”

Shingles is a very itchy, painful, burning group of blisters caused by the reactivation of the chickenpox (varicella-zoster) virus. The rash commonly affects one area of the body, often the chest, but it can also affect any nerves including those in the face and eyes and can last up to four weeks.

However for some people, pain can persist for several months, or even years, after the rash has disappeared.

From 1 September 2017, the shingles vaccine will be offered to:

- patients aged 70 years - as part of the routine programme
- patients aged 78 years – as part of the catch up programme

In addition, patients who were eligible for immunisation in the first four years of the programme (which began on 1 September 2013) but have not yet been vaccinated against shingles remain eligible until their 80th birthday.

These are:

- patients aged 71 to 73 on 1 September 2017
- patients aged 79 on 1 September 2017

Patients currently aged 74 – 77 years of age are not currently eligible for this vaccine but they will be offered it as they become 78 as part of the catch up programme over the next few years.

Patients who are eligible for the vaccine should receive a letter from their GP surgery. This will often be offered alongside the annual Flu vaccine, but it does not need to be and may be given at any time between September and August each year.

Patients who are due to turn 80 before the 1 September 2017 should be encouraged to make an appointment to have the vaccine as soon as possible to ensure that they do not miss their opportunity to have this vaccine.

The NHS encourages eligible patients to speak to their GP practice to arrange to be vaccinated.

South West data as of March 2016 – March 2017

CCG	No. in routine cohort eligible – Aged 70	No. in routine cohort vaccinated – Aged 70	No. in routine cohort not vaccinated	No. in catch-up cohort eligible – Aged 78 - 79	No. in catch-up cohort vaccinated – Aged 78 - 79	No. in catch-up cohort not vaccinated
Bristol	2949	1228	1721	1908	814	1094
North Somerset	1664	1123	541	1123	598	525
Somerset	6257	3954	2303	3954	2087	1867
South Gloucs	2222	1556	666	1556	858	698
Kernow	7670	3072	4598	4321	1718	2603
NEW Devon	10488	4860	5628	6490	2952	3538
S Devon & Torbay	3132	1233	1899	1900	764	1136
South West	34382	17026	17356	21252	9791	11461

Data from Immform 31st March 2017
331 Practices Responded - representing 86.3% response

ENDS

For more information please contact the NHS England in the South West:

Hannah Darley
0113 825 3329

Notes to editors

- Around nine in every 10 people have had chickenpox and are therefore at potential risk of developing shingles in old age. It is a common misconception that if you have had chickenpox you are immune to the virus for life, but it actually lies dormant in the nervous system and can reactivate when the immune system is weakened (which is why those aged over 70 are more at risk from the illness).
- Shingles is rarely life threatening, but due to [complications](#) that can occur as a result of shingles this means that around 1 in every 1,000 cases in adults over the age of 70 is fatal.
- There is no cure for shingles, but the shingles vaccine can help prevent people from developing shingles in old age
- The NHS shingles vaccination programme was first introduced in September 2013 and in time will work towards offering immunisation to all 70 to 79 year-olds. The shingles vaccine is available on the NHS for people from the date they turn the required age (70 or 78) and to people aged 71, 72, 73 or 79 who haven't been vaccinated yet.
- The shingles vaccination is not routinely provided to anyone aged over 80 by the NHS because it seems less effective in this age group.
- The latest local data shows 28,817 eligible elderly people across the South West are at risk of developing Shingles due to not being vaccinated.
- Those eligible for the shingles vaccination can have it at any time of the year, although many people find it convenient to have it at the same time as their annual flu vaccination (which is usually available to patients between October and February each year). Once vaccinated against shingles you are protected against the illness for at least 5 years.
- More information about shingles is on the NHS Choices website [here](#), along with detailed [information](#) about eligibility for the shingles vaccine.