Public Health England

NHS England

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Dear Colleague

The shingles immunisation programme: evaluation of the programme and implementation in 2018.

The first evidence from the evaluation of the shingles immunisation programme[1] demonstrates a marked impact on GP consultations for shingles and post herpetic neuralgia (PHN) in those individuals eligible for vaccination, and therefore emphasises the importance of this programme.

Patients can be offered the shingles vaccine (Zostavax®) as soon as they reach the eligible age (70 or 78 years). In 2017/18 it was agreed that patients could be opportunistically immunised at any point in the year. In order to ensure appropriate vaccine supply, practices were asked to maintain the existing approach, with the majority of patients being immunised in the autumn months during the influenza vaccine season.

This letter is to inform practices that the shingles vaccine can now be offered opportunistically to patients **throughout the year** as they become of eligible age, preferably from April onwards to align with increased central vaccine availability.

The vaccine should be offered to:

- patients aged 70 years, on or after their 70th birthday
- patients aged 78 years, on or after their 78th birthday
- patients who were eligible for immunisation in the previous programme years but have not yet been vaccinated against shingles. These are:
    - anyone in their 70s who was born on or after 2/9/1942
    - 79 year olds (until their 80th birthday).

Care must be taken not to miss the patients who have already turned 70 or 78 years of age since 2 September 2017.

[1] Amirthalingam, G., et al. Evaluation of the effect of the herpes zoster vaccination programme 3 years after its introduction in England: a population-based study. Lancet Public Health. 2017 Dec 21. pii: S2468-2667(17)30234-7. doi: 10.1016/S2468-2667(17)30234-7. [Epub ahead of print].

Patients remain eligible until their 80th birthday due to the reducing efficacy of the vaccine as age increases[2].

By the end of August 2017 just under half of eligible 70 and 78 year olds had been vaccinated against shingles[3]. We are seeing a year on year decline in shingles vaccine uptake, but hope that simplifying eligibility will assist in helping practices to identify eligible patients (including those who have missed out previously).

Clinical guidance

We continue to receive reports of immunosuppressed individuals receiving the vaccine inadvertently. Zostavax® vaccine contains live herpes zoster virus and should not be given to certain patient groups. Due to the complex clinical exclusion criteria for this vaccine, we recommend that immunisers have a paper copy of the shingles PGD[4] available when discussing vaccination with their patients and checking their medical history. This will allow easier identification of patients for whom the vaccine may be contraindicated.
Detailed clinical guidance on administering shingles immunisation is contained in Chapter 28a of immunisation against infectious disease (the Green Book):
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/shingles-herpes-zoster-the-green-book-chapter-28a

Information for Healthcare Professionals is available at:
https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/shingles-vaccination-programme

Patient information materials

The shingles vaccine leaflet, postcard and posters can be ordered free of charge from the DH / PHE Order line:
https://www.orderline.dh.gov.uk/ecom_dh/public/home.jsf

Vaccine supply

Zostavax® can be ordered online via the ImmForm website[5] and it is recommended that practices hold no more than two weeks' worth of stock. The shelf life of this vaccine can sometimes be shorter than anticipated, so taking a little and often approach to vaccine ordering is recommended. Please make sure that locally held stocks of vaccine are rotated in fridges so that wastage is minimised. Where possible orders for Zostavax® should be placed with those for childhood vaccines to ensure an efficient delivery service is maintained.

[2] Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (2010) Statement on varicella and herpes zoster vaccines 29 March 2010: webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/www.dh.gov.uk/ab/JCVI/DH_094744
[3] Herpes zoster (shingles) immunisation programme 2016 to 2017 evaluation report: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/herpes-zoster-shingles-immunisation-programme-2016-to-2017-evaluation-report
[4] Shingles vaccine (Zostavax®) PGD template: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/shingles-vaccine-zostavax-patient-group-direction-pgd-template
[5] ImmForm website for vaccine ordering: https://portal.immform.dh.gov.uk/Logon.aspx?returnurl=%2f

Simplification of the eligibility criteria should be better for patients and healthcare professionals. The supply of vaccine has been adjusted by PHE to accommodate this change. We would ask that every effort is made to vaccinate throughout the year as people become eligible to ensure that supplies of vaccine are used effectively and to minimise wastage.

If you have any further queries, please email them to immunisation@phe.gov.uk

As we have seen such a positive impact from the immunisation programme we want to make this better still. Please help us in achieving this by taking every opportunity to offer shingles vaccine to eligible patients **throughout the year** to help protect as many older people as possible. Please make use of the free patient information materials (details above) to help to promote this important programme to encourage eligible individuals to come forward.

We are grateful for your continued support of the shingles immunisation programme.

Yours faithfully

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