

Press Release

Shingles Awareness Week: Influencing Action on Shingles Vaccination Policy in Europe

17 February 2023 – The International Federation on Ageing is proud to release the *Influencing Action on Shingles Vaccination Policy* report as part of Shingles Awareness Week 2023. The *Influencing Action on Shingles Vaccination Policy* project aimed to comprehensively review the status of shingles vaccination across Europe as a mechanism to better understand current barriers and challenges that may be experienced when seeking vaccination in these countries. Findings from the study will help shape immunisation policy towards the inclusion of shingles as an important component of a comprehensive program.

Shingles, also known as herpes zoster, is a particularly debilitating vaccine-preventable disease which significantly impacts a person's function and quality of life. It is characterized by a painful rash lasting over weeks and caused by the reactivation of varicella zoster virus (VZV), also known as the virus that causes chickenpox. Reactivation usually occurs decades after the primary infection due to waning immune responses. Anyone who has had chickenpox is at risk of experiencing shingles. Current data illustrates that one in three adults will experience shingles in their lifetime, most being over the age of 50 years. The prevalence of shingles will continue to impact a significant proportion of older people and generations of older people to come. Despite the proven efficacy of the shingles vaccine in preventing and reducing the severity of disease; its value has been hindered by a lack of awareness and integration into robust immunisation policies.

This project found that only 50% of countries studied included shingles within their national immunization programs and only 28% provided comprehensive funding. No countries studied are currently providing publicly available shingles vaccine coverage rates, which limits the ability of evidence-informed policy changes to occur regarding the value, use, and accessibility of shingles vaccines. There remain barriers to those who do seek out vaccination, the largest of which was found to be the out-of-pocket cost to patients. Lack of information on the severity of shingles infection, and the increased risk to older adults continues serve as a barrier towards increasing uptake rates.

“COVID-19 was a real turning point for adult vaccination... the concept of vaccination through the ages was not well recognized before” said Ms. Isabel Saraiva former chair of the European Lung Federation, and President of the Portuguese Association Respira - People with COPD and Other Chronic Respiratory Diseases “however we must act quickly, as this window of opportunity is closing.” Given the substantial socioeconomic burden of shingles among older adults, and its grave impact on their overall well-being, there is an urgent and crucial need to prioritize shingles vaccination policy to ensure healthy ageing for current and future generations of older people.

To learn more about shingles, and the findings of the *Influencing Action on Shingles Vaccination Policy* project explore the full report here: bit.ly/41kIYI7 and register for the upcoming webinar on 1 March from 9.00-10.00 EST here: <http://bit.ly/3YYpkbS>. As part of Shingles Awareness Week, this webinar aims to provide information on the importance of Shingles immunisation for adults and provide an overview of the current status of Shingles vaccine policy in Europe.