

# US approves breakthrough vaccine to prevent shingles

## United States

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A vaccine against shingles is being hailed as a breakthrough in preventing adults falling ill from the disease in later life.

American authorities have granted approval for the Shingrix inoculation, which the drug company GlaxoSmith-Kline will make available in the US this month. In studies the vaccine prevented more than 90 per cent of shingles cases, and is being recommended by the Centres for Disease Control for adults over 50.

The new jab is more effective than an older vaccine, Zostavax, the CDC said. The drug has also been approved in Canada and is under review in Japan and Europe. About a million Ameri-

cans a year contract shingles, which is caused by the varicella zoster herpes virus that also causes chickenpox. The virus, which lies dormant after a person has had chickenpox, can make a resurgence as immunity weakens in later life.

Without a vaccine, those who live to the age of 85 have a 50 per cent chance of contracting shingles, which causes debilitating nerve pain, scars and ulcers. In Britain, the shingles vaccine is given only to those aged above 70, although one in ten people aged over 50 suffers the illness, according to the Oxford Vaccine Group.

The approval for Shingrix will put pressure on Merck, which makes Zostavax, from which it made \$491 million in sales this year. Analysts expect sales of Shingrix to reach more than \$1 billion within five years.

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