



Building a Shingles Atlas for Adult Vaccination

Greece

National Vaccine Recommendations Process

The National Committee on Immunizations is the National Immunization Technical Advisory Group (NITAG) in Greece. It was established in 1991 to provide the Ministry of Health (MoH) advice on immunization programs, strategy formulation, and guidance on policies. The responsibilities of the committee include:

- Recommendations to inform the National Immunization Plan
- Advice on the inclusion or exclusion of a vaccine to the National Immunization Plan
- Assist in emergencies to notify the public of upcoming vaccination schedules in public health emergencies.

The Committee has no systematic approach for developing national vaccine recommendations.¹ Furthermore, the National Immunisation Programme in Greece is recommended and not mandatory in its implementation by the public.

Shingles Vaccine Recommendations and Schedules

As of 2024, in Greece, the Ministry of Health recommends both the live attenuated virus (ZVL) vaccine and the inactivated recombinant vaccine (RZV) against shingles.² One dose of ZVL is recommended for adults between the ages of 60 and 75 years, regardless of whether there has been a previous incidence/episode of herpes zoster (shingles).² RZV is given in two doses and is recommended for people aged 18 years and older with immunosuppression, with a recommended interval of 1-2 months. It is also recommended for persons aged 60 years and older, with a recommended interval of 2 months but no later than 6 months.² The Ministry of Health favors the vaccination of people aged 70 years and older with the RZV vaccine. Patients can also receive the RZV vaccine if they have been previously vaccinated with ZVL 5 years prior. Typically, attending doctors recommend and prescribe which vaccine of the two for shingles would be more appropriate for the individual.

Adult Shingles Vaccine Funding

Vaccines included in the national vaccination programme, including those against shingles, are provided free of charge to all legal residents in the country, whether insured or not, including asylum-seekers. Vaccines are covered through the Greek National Health Service Organization (EOPYY) and by extension from the state budget. There are no charges at the point of delivery for vaccinations included in the national vaccination programme. Both vaccinations against shingles, the RZV and ZVL vaccines are fully reimbursed for individuals aged 60 years and older and individuals aged 18 years and older with immunosuppression.

Vaccine Coverage Rates

A study to investigate the vaccination coverage of influenza, pneumococcal, and herpes zoster vaccines in older patients found a vaccination coverage rate for HZ of 20%.³

However, there is no government data on herpes zoster vaccination coverage in Greece.

Monitoring Mechanisms for Vaccination Coverage

Vaccination coverage of the population is researched at the national level through studies conducted by the National School of Public Health, universities, the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, and by the Hellenic Statistical Authority, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health.⁴

Shingles Vaccination Pathway

In Greece, the health professionals who administer the vaccines are traditionally nurses and physicians in the public and private sectors. Mobile populations (e.g., such as refugees and asylum applicants) with no social insurance are vaccinated by organizations such as the National Red Cross following the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention’s guidelines.⁴

Prevalence Rate on Burden of Shingles

While recent studies in Greece have not provided a detailed overview of the incidence of herpes zoster, a 2011 study conducted in rural Crete, Greece, reported an incidence rate of 1.4 cases per 1000 patients per year.⁵ The study also estimated a general population incidence of between 3 to 4 persons per 1000 person-years.⁵

Barriers

In a 2024 study, perceptions, and practices regarding adult vaccinations against herpes zoster and other diseases such as influenza, tetanus, pneumococcal disease, and COVID-19 were explored.⁶ Barriers against herpes zoster vaccination identified included a lack of health professional recommendations. Participants reported that herpes zoster vaccination was not recommended by their healthcare providers as frequently as some of the other vaccinations. The biggest barrier identified was inadequate information. Participants felt that they had insufficient knowledge about herpes zoster and the vaccine, leading to a misunderstanding or underestimation of their own susceptibility to shingles.

References

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