

# Zoster vaccination: What resources are available for immunisation providers to help them decide the appropriate vaccine for adults, particular those with immunocompromise?

Recent research, led by the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance (NCIRS), has found knowledge gaps continue to exist among Australian general practitioners (GPs) regarding the use of live attenuated zoster vaccine (Zostavax) in people who are immunocompromised.

While Zostavax is a safe vaccine, its use is contraindicated in immunocompromised people because the virus from the vaccine can cause serious disseminated infection. There have been three Zostavax-related deaths in immunocompromised people between 2017 and 2020 in Australia.

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) recently issued an update to its guidance on the clinical use of zoster vaccine in adults.

Zostavax was introduced on the National Immunisation Program in November 2016 for people aged 70 years, with a catch-up program for adults aged 71–79 years funded until October 2023.

A non-live recombinant subunit zoster vaccine, Shingrix, is now available in the private market and provides an alternative, especially for immunocompromised people. While Zostavax is generally contraindicated in immunocompromised adults, there are situations where it may be given to those with a mild immunocompromise after careful assessment of the degree of immunocompromise using the [Live shingles vaccine \(Zostavax\) screening for contraindications tool](#).

It is timely to highlight the information and resources available to immunisation providers regarding zoster vaccines:

- Australian Immunisation Handbook  
[Live shingles vaccine \(Zostavax\) screening for contraindications tool](#)  
[Zoster chapter](#)
- [ATAGI statement on the clinical use of Zoster vaccine in older adults in Australia](#)
- NCIRS resources  
[Zoster vaccines for Australian adults – fact sheet](#)  
[Zoster vaccines for Australian adults – frequently asked questions](#)
- AusVaxSafety  
[Zostavax vaccine safety data](#)
- [State and territory specialist immunisation services](#)

Providers should talk to an immunisation specialist or the patient's treating physician if they are unsure whether Zostavax use is appropriate, for example, in people with mild to moderate immunocompromise. You can read more about the recent NCIRS research [here](#).