



Heads Up from Health Protection- March 2026

This month's edition includes:-

- *Shingles*
 - *HPV Awareness Day - 4th March*
 - *Important RSV Update*
 - *Tummy Turmoil - Let's Talk Diarrhoea & Vomiting!*
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"Ain't got time to fix the shingles" is a line from which song that topped the UK singles chart in 1981?

(find the answer below)

Shingles

Unlike most other infections, you don't catch shingles from someone else.

Most of us had chickenpox when we were young, although you may not be aware that you had it. After having chickenpox, the virus (varicella zoster) remains dormant living in the nerves, and for most of your life you won't be aware of this but, from time to time the virus can come back and spread to an area of skin served by one of the nerves causing shingles also known as herpes zoster. **About 1 in 5 people who've had chickenpox will develop shingles**, so every year in England and Wales, **tens of thousands of people will develop shingles**. Although shingles can occur at any age, the risk, severity and the complications of shingles all increase with age.

Shingles can be very painful and tends to affect people more commonly as they get older, this can be because your immune system is weakened by increasing age, by stress or by a range of medical conditions and treatments.

The first signs of shingles can be feeling generally unwell with a tingling or burning feeling in an area of skin on one side of the body.



A few days after the initial symptoms, a cluster of extremely painful and itchy, fluid filled blisters usually appear. These can burst and turn into sores that eventually crust over and heal.

These blisters usually affect an area on one side of the body, most commonly the chest, but sometimes also the head, face and eye. If shingles develops in the eye and eyelid, it can lead to decreased vision or even permanent blindness in that eye.



Can shingles spread?

Shingles does not spread as easily as chickenpox, but the fluid in the blisters does contain the chickenpox virus. So someone who is not immune to chickenpox (typically those who haven't had chicken pox or the vaccine which has not been available till now via the NHS) can catch the infection if they are in contact with this fluid. If you have a shingles rash you should cover the rash with loose clothing to reduce the risk of spreading chickenpox.

Pregnant women who have not had chickenpox, people with a weakened immune system and newborn babies should avoid direct contact with the rash.

Post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN)- Herpetic – disease caused by a herpes virus e.g. Shingles and neuralgia – pain in a nerve pathway / nerve pain

Each year, about **14,000 people develop post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN) after having shingles, with over 1,400 admitted to hospital as a result.** Most people recover fully after a few weeks, but for some, the pain caused by shingles goes on for several months or even years and can really affect your life, stopping you from doing the things you enjoy – this is called post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN). This is a particularly unpleasant condition with severe burning, throbbing or a stabbing nerve pain. The older you are, the more likely you are to have long-lasting pain. **The good news isThe shingles vaccine reduces both the risk of getting shingles and PHN.**

Who will get the vaccine?

The vaccine programme is being offered to the following:

1. Healthy people 70 to 79 years of age who have not yet been vaccinated.

2. People from 18 years of age with a severely weakened immune system.
3. Healthy people aged 60 to 70 years will become eligible for the vaccine when they turn 65 or 70 years of age.

You will remain eligible for the shingles vaccine until your 80th birthday (unless you have a weakened immune system), but the sooner you have the vaccine the earlier you will be protected.

For more information click here - [There's a vaccine to help protect you from the pain of shingles](#)

HPV Awareness Day- 4th March

4th March 2026 is HPV Awareness Day

This day is observed annually to highlight the importance of human papillomavirus (HPV). It's designed to inform and educate people about HPV, normalise conversations about the virus to reduce stigma and encourage preventative actions like vaccination and screening to reduce the burden of HPV related cancers.

What is HPV?

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a group of viruses. It can be symptomless and go away on its own, but sometimes it causes disease. HPV can cause warts and verrucae, and certain "high risk" types can cause cell changes that may lead to cancers such as mouth, throat, head, neck, cervical, and penile.

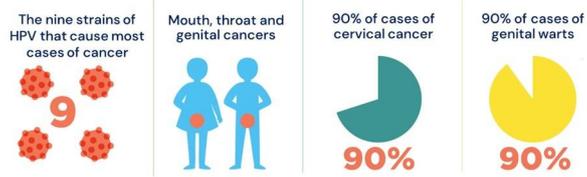
How do I get HPV?

HPV is very contagious with 4 out of 5 people getting it in their lifetime. It is spread by touching the skin of the genital area (penis or vagina) of someone who has it. Using condoms reduces the risk but does not stop you from catching it, though they do prevent other sexually transmitted diseases.

How can I prevent getting HPV?

By having the HPV vaccination which reduces the spread of HPV. The HPV vaccine has proven to be highly effective in preventing HPV-related cancer. The vaccine is offered to boys and girls aged 12 -13 years old in year 8. In 2024/2025, [one in four school leavers did not have the vaccine](#). If you are 14-15 years old and have missed your vaccination at school, you should try and have it as soon as possible. Contact your school nurse, school immunisation team or GP practice to arrange an appointment. You remain eligible to receive the vaccine up until your 25th birthday.

What does the HPV vaccine protect against?



1 - Source :[University of Bristol: EDUCATE](#)

How you can support HPV Awareness

Parents can help protect their child from getting HPV by submitting the consent form, in either electronic or paper format, before the vaccination is due.

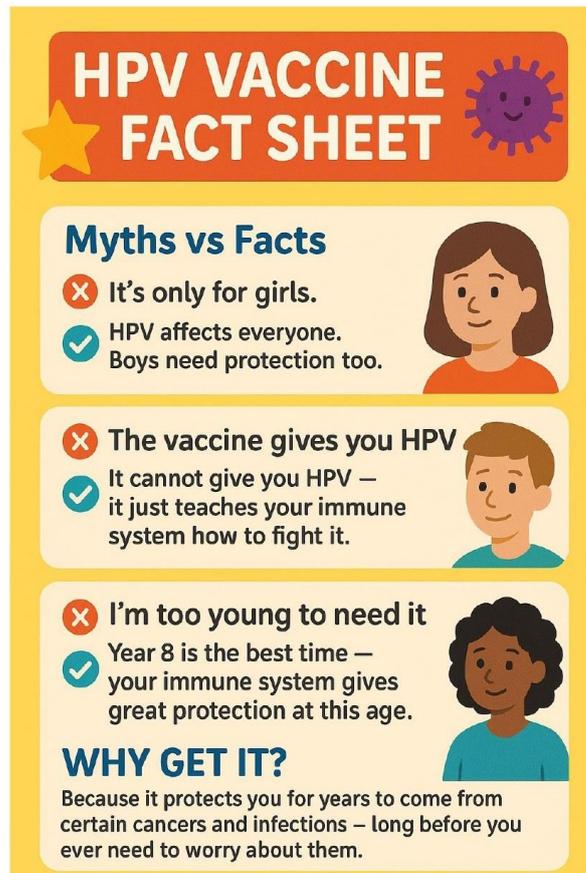
The NHS is aiming to eliminate cervical cancer by 2040, and getting more people vaccinated plays a big part.

For more information, please visit: [HPV vaccine - NHS](#)

Let's beat HPV! Together we can make a difference



2 - Source: [Kingston and Richmond NHS Foundation Trust](#)



3 - If you would like a pdf version of this poster please email healthprotection@lancashire.gov.uk

RSV Update

The expansion of RSV vaccine eligibility to those aged 80 years and older and residents in care homes for older adults

The government has confirmed the expansion of the eligibility criteria for the NHS *Respiratory Syncytial Virus* (RSV) vaccination programme.

From 1 April 2026, vaccination will be offered in England to:

- adults aged 80 years and over (with no upper age limit).
- all residents in care homes for older adults, regardless of their age, due to their increased risk from RSV.

This is in addition to the existing programme, which offers RSV vaccination to:

- adults turning 75 years.
- adults aged 75 to 79 years when the programme began.
- pregnant women (to protect their newborn babies).

RSV can be severe in older adults, causing Pneumonia and flare ups in existing lung disease and other long term conditions. It causes around 9000 hospitalisations in those aged over 75 in the UK each year. [UKHSA RSV](#)

Those who are eligible for both RSV and COVID-19 vaccinations will be able to get both vaccines at the same appointment once the spring 2026 COVID-19 campaign begins on 13 April 2026.

Individuals eligible for both programmes include people who have not already had an RSV vaccine and are either:

- aged 75 or over.
- a resident in a care home for older adults.

For more information on RSV, please see our [NHS RSV](#).



Stay One Step Ahead of Diarrhoea and Vomiting

Norovirus is a stomach bug that causes vomiting and diarrhoea. It spreads easily, mainly from person to person but also through contaminated food or water, and you can catch it

more than once. Outbreaks are common in places where people are in close contact, such as hospitals, care homes, schools and nurseries.

What are the symptoms of norovirus infection?

The incubation period is usually 12–48 hours. Symptoms can start suddenly and include nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea, with possible fever, stomach pain and aching limbs.

How long are you contagious for with norovirus?

People are most infectious while symptomatic but can spread norovirus before and after symptoms. You should stay home and avoid preparing food for 48 hours after symptoms stop.

How long do norovirus symptoms last?

For most people, norovirus is unpleasant but short-lived, and they recover in 2–3 days without treatment. However, vulnerable individuals can develop complications like dehydration, which may lead to hospitalisation.

How long does norovirus last on surfaces?

Norovirus can survive on surfaces for long periods, helping it spread easily. Clean contaminated areas thoroughly with a bleach-based disinfectant and wear disposable gloves if possible.

What treatment is there for norovirus?

There's no specific treatment for norovirus, and antibiotics don't work against viruses. The focus is on preventing dehydration by drinking plenty of fluids. Older adults, young children and people with weakened immune systems are at higher risk of dehydration and may need medical care.

Norovirus cases are over 50% higher than the 5-season average, especially among people aged 65+ and in hospitals. UKHSA ([UK Health Security Agency](#)) is urging people to take simple steps to reduce the spread.

How can I avoid catching norovirus?

Good hand hygiene is crucial to stop norovirus spreading. Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and warm water, particularly after using the toilet, before eating or preparing food, and after cleaning up vomit or diarrhoea. Alcohol-based hand sanitisers don't kill norovirus.

How to reduce the spread of infection:

- Wash hands often with soap and warm water—alcohol gels don't kill norovirus.
- Clean surfaces with bleach-based disinfectant.
- Avoid visiting hospitals or care homes until 48 hours after symptoms stop.
- Stay off school or work for at least 2 days after symptoms end.
- Avoid swimming pools for 48 hours after symptoms.
- Wash contaminated clothes or bedding at 60°C and wear gloves when handling items; disinfect affected surfaces thoroughly.

Some good news... while norovirus is increasing, cases of flu and RSV continue to fall. However, people are encouraged to continue taking infection prevention measures listed above, as respiratory viruses can be unpredictable.



UK Health Security Agency

Diarrhoea and vomiting

Diarrhoea and vomiting bugs can spread easily

Follow these simple steps to avoid infecting others

Swipe for more ▶



Got these symptoms?



Feeling sick



Diarrhoea



Being sick

You may also have:



High temperature



Headache



Aching arms and legs

Stay at home for **48 hours** after your symptoms clear:

DO



Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water



Wash soiled clothes and bedding at 60 degrees

Stay at home for **48 hours** after your symptoms clear:

DON'T



Go to work or school, visit care homes or hospitals

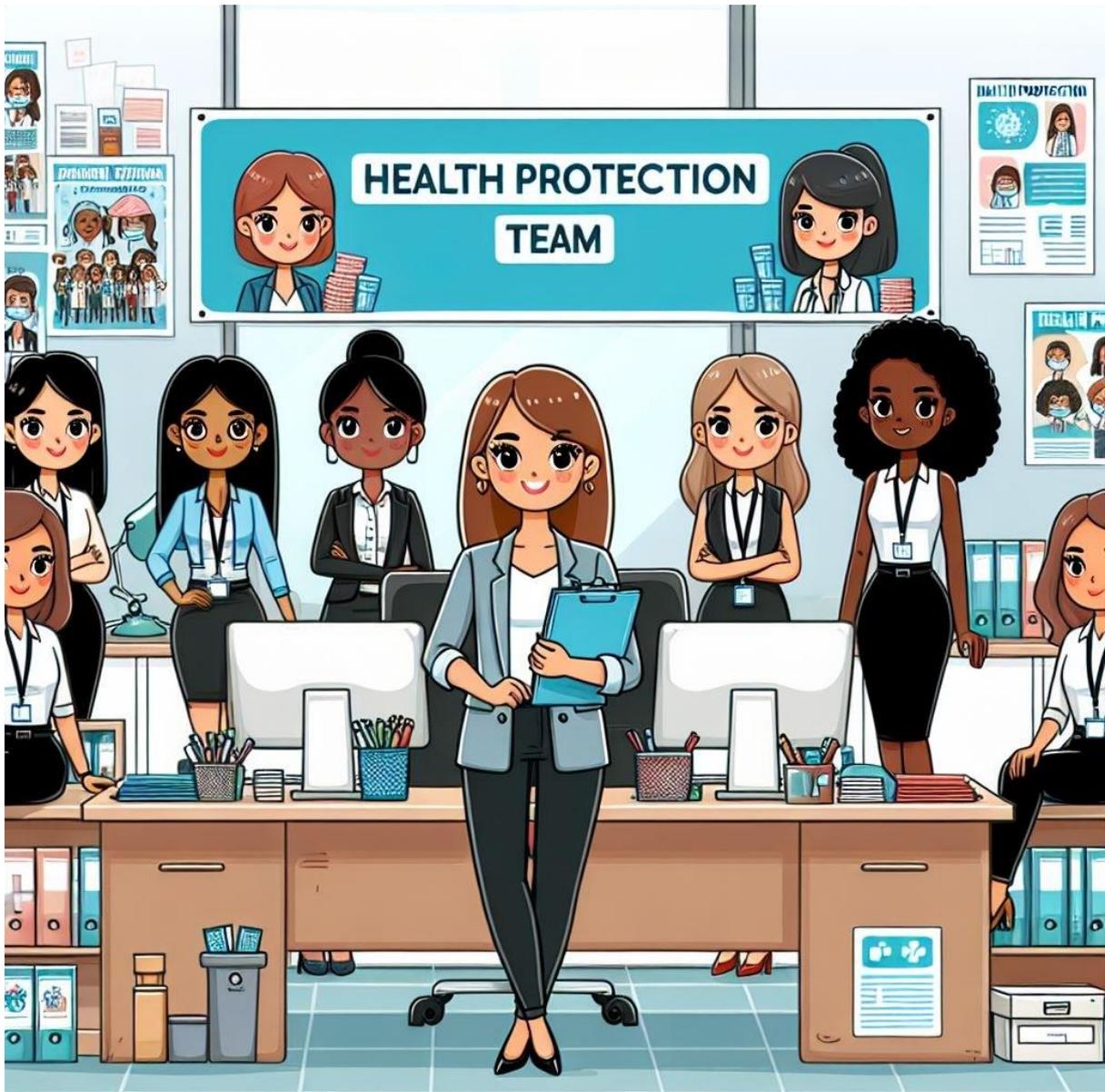


Prepare food for others

**For more information
on how to help
yourself or your family
members recover,
visit the [NHS website](#).**



Meet the team





4 - image designed by AI copilot

The Health Protection Team are getting out and about, speaking to local residents to raise awareness on the national screening and vaccination programmes available.

This month we will be at:

Burnley Family Hub

Chai Centre, Hurtley Street, Burnley.

on Wednesday 18th March between 9:30 -11am

In April we will be at:

Lancaster Family Hub

Lune Park, Owen Road, Lancaster.

on Wednesday 15th April between 9 am - 12

In next month's edition:-

- Bowel Screening
- Covid Booster
- Petting Farms
- Tick Awareness
- Giant Hogweed

[Health Protection Archive: All Previous Issues in One Place](#)

Each month, we've shared updates, insights, and resources to support our work and keep everyone informed. Below, you'll find links to all past issues—feel free to revisit any that you may have missed or want to explore again.

[Heads Up From Health Protection Archives](#)

This information has been produced by the Health Protection Team at Lancashire County Council.

If you require a printable version of this Health Protection bulletin please email the team at healthprotection@lancashire.gov.uk

(Information correct at March 2026)



This Old House - Shakin' Stevens

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