

# Zostavax contraindications

For distribution to all doctors and nurses in the practice/clinic.

Important update  
27 February 2017

## KEY POINTS

1. Zostavax is contraindicated in patients who are immunocompromised.
2. Administration where contraindicated has resulted in a death in Australia.
3. Do not administer Zostavax to patients who are immunocompromised.

**If in doubt, seek advice from a specialist.**

Zostavax contains live attenuated varicella-zoster virus, containing 14 times more virus than childhood varicella vaccines. Administration to people who are immunocompromised is associated with risk of disseminated disease from the vaccine virus. In addition to being contraindicated for those with previous anaphylaxis to the vaccine or its components, it is vital all GPs are aware of the following **contraindications** which include, but are not limited to:

- **Haematological or generalised malignancies (including those not on treatment)**, e.g. lymphoma, acute or chronic leukaemia, Hodgkin's disease
- **Solid organ or bone marrow transplant recipients** (with exceptions as advised by specialists)
- **HIV/AIDS** (with exceptions as advised by a specialist) **or other congenital/acquired immunodeficiencies**
- **Current or recent high-dose systemic immunosuppressive therapy**, e.g. chemotherapy, radiation therapy, oral corticosteroids, disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs.

## Guide to safe doses of immunosuppressive therapy for Zostavax administration:

Mechanism of action	Examples	Safe dose*	Comments
<b>Anti-TNF</b>	Etanercept, Infliximab, Adalimumab	NONE	Immunise 1 month prior to treatment initiation OR 12 months post treatment cessation
<b>IL-1 inhibition</b>	Anakinra	NONE	
<b>Costimulation blockade</b>	Abatacept	NONE	
<b>B-cell Depletion/Inhibition</b>	Rituximab	NONE	
<b>Immunomodulators (Antimetabolites)</b>	Azathioprine 6-Mercaptopurine Methotrexate	≤3.0 mg/kg/day ≤1.5 mg/kg/day ≤0.4 mg/kg/week	If on higher dose, immunise 1 month prior to treatment initiation OR 3 months post treatment cessation
<b>Corticosteroids</b>	Prednisone	Complex	Refer to Immunisation handbook and NCIRS fact sheet
<b>T-cell activation inhibition</b>	Tacrolimus, Cyclosporine	NONE	Immunise 1 month prior to treatment initiation OR 3 months post treatment cessation
<b>Others</b>	Cyclophosphamide, Mycophenolate, Sulfasalazine	NONE	

\*See Australian Immunisation Handbook, Chapters 3.3.3 and 4.24

<http://www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/Handbook10-home>

**CAUTION: This is not a complete list of all immunosuppressive medications. If someone is on a combination of medications or if there is any doubt whether Zostavax is safe for your patient, defer vaccination and seek specialist advice.**

**Inadvertent administration of an immunocompromised person:** Urgently contact the treating specialist or infectious disease specialist for advice on use of antivirals.

## Further information

- National Centre for Immunisation Research & Surveillance fact sheets:  
[www.ncirs.edu.au/assets/provider\\_resources/fact-sheets/zoster-vaccine-FAQ.pdf](http://www.ncirs.edu.au/assets/provider_resources/fact-sheets/zoster-vaccine-FAQ.pdf)  
[www.ncirs.edu.au/assets/provider\\_resources/fact-sheets/zoster-vaccine-fact-sheet.pdf](http://www.ncirs.edu.au/assets/provider_resources/fact-sheets/zoster-vaccine-fact-sheet.pdf)
- Your local public health unit – contact details at <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/system-governance/contact-us/contact/public-health-units>