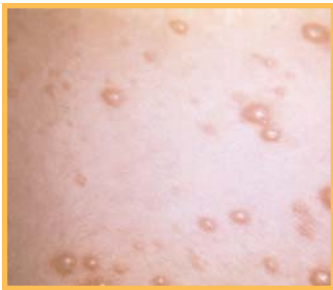


Shingles Vaccination: Should Polio Survivors Receive One?

When polio survivors began asking about the shingles vaccination, PHI polled 19 doctors (experienced in treating polio survivors) for their recommendations. No conclusion could be drawn from their varied responses. Also, currently there is no experimental data regarding whether or not polio survivors should get this vaccine. Therefore, the most prudent thing to do is to study available information, talk with your physician about your individual circumstances, and then make your own decision.



Herpes zoster (shingles).
Courtesy of Centers for Disease Control
and Prevention

Consult your personal physician about receiving a shingles immunization and to be sure that you have received all of your adult shots.

The Vaccine: In 2006, a vaccine called ZOSTAVAX® was licensed to prevent shingles in people over age 60. In the clinical trial, the vaccine was successful in 51% of the participants 60 and older, and was most effective in those aged 60 to 69. Shingles-related pain was also reduced in many of those receiving the vaccine.

Precautions: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says those who should not get this vaccine are people who have had a life-threatening allergic reaction to gelatin, the antibiotic neomycin, or any other component of the shingles vaccine. The CDC advises those who have severe allergies to inform their doctor when considering the vaccine.

Because the shingles vaccine contains the live though weakened chickenpox virus, the CDC does not recommend the vaccine for individuals with the following: a weakened immune system due to HIV/AIDS or another disease that affects the immune system; a history of cancer affecting the bone marrow or lymphatic system, such as leukemia or lymphoma; treatment

that affects the immune system, such as steroids for organ transplants, or radiation/chemotherapy for cancer; and active untreated tuberculosis.

Individuals who are moderately or severely ill (including those with a temperature of 101.3° or higher) should wait to get their vaccine until they are well.

The Disease: Approximately one million cases of shingles (also known as herpes zoster) occur in the United States each year, generally in people over age 50. Varicella-zoster virus (VZV), the same virus that causes chickenpox, causes shingles. Anyone who had chickenpox is at risk for shingles because the chickenpox virus remains in the nervous system for the rest of one's life. Certain circumstances, such as stress or immune deficiency, can cause the virus to reactivate and move back down the nerve fibers to the skin, causing the rash of blisters that is the hallmark of shingles.

Shingles may begin as a sensitive or burning feeling in the skin that turns to a rash, usually down a certain

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nerve on one area and one side of the body. Shingles blisters then form for a number of days before they pop and finally crust over and heal. The entire process can take several weeks.

Symptoms and Complications:

Fever, chills, upset stomach and headache can indicate shingles. Very rarely, shingles can result in pneumonia, hearing difficulties, blindness, encephalitis or death. A common complication of shingles is nerve pain. When this pain continues for more than a month, it's known as postherpetic neuralgia, which occurs in more than 40% of those over 60 who have had shingles. This can be devastating. In some cases, certain medications may be used to alleviate the situation.

Interesting Facts: People who have had shingles can get it again. Only people who had chickenpox or chickenpox vaccine can get shingles; the chickenpox virus stays in the body forever. Shingles is not contagious. However, a person who never had chickenpox or the chickenpox vaccine can get chickenpox from someone with shingles.

Cost: The cost of the vaccine ranges between \$195 and \$220, and it is covered by most private insurers. In one area of the US, the vaccine is administered in pharmacies for a cash fee of \$220. Plan D picks up from \$25 to the full amount, depending on the coverage one has chosen. Medicare itself won't pay for the vaccine, though it will pay a \$20 administration fee. Getting the best price may take a few phone calls in each separate locality. ▲

ZOSTAVAX® (Zoster Vaccine Live) is a registered trademark of Merck & Co., Inc.

Wise Choices Feeling Better with Shingles

See your doctor at the first sign of shingles. It often begins as burning or shooting pain and tingling or itching on one side of the body, followed by a blistering rash. Early treatment can help shorten the length of infection and reduce the risk of other problems.

Your doctor may prescribe:

- Antiviral drugs to help kill the varicella-zoster virus.
- Steroids to lessen pain and shorten the time you're sick.
- Antidepressants, anticonvulsants or analgesics to reduce pain.

Things you can do:

- Get enough rest and eat well-balanced meals.
- Try to relax. Stress can make the pain worse.
- Dip a washcloth in cool water and apply it to your blisters to ease the pain.
- Do things that take your mind off your pain. Watch TV, read books, talk with friends, or work on a hobby.

Source: *NIH News in Health*

Resources

NINDS Shingles Information Page

www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/shingles/shingles.htm

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

1600 Clifton Rd
Atlanta, GA 30333 USA

Public Inquiries:

404-498-1515 / 800-311-3435

Shingles Vaccine; What You Need to Know

www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/vis/downloads/vis-shingles.pdf

Message to newsletter editors:

The above article is just one in a series of monthly columns that PHI continues to develop and make available to its Association Members to "cut and paste" for their newsletters.

For details on how your group can become an Association Member and receive the *PHI Association Member Communiqué*, contact director@post-polio.org.