

## Health and Wellness Tips – April 2015

### The Shingles Vaccine

#### **What is Shingles?**

Shingles is a condition that arises from the varicella zoster virus. This is the virus that causes chicken pox also. Once a person has had chicken pox, the virus remains inactive in the body. The virus can reactivate and therefore, anyone who has had the chicken pox could potentially get shingles at some time in their life.

#### **What are the signs & symptoms of shingles?**

Shingles occurs as a very painful, blistering rash that affects the nerves on one side of the body. The rash is often very painful to the touch making it very uncomfortable to have clothing on it. Typical sites are the face, back and torso. The rash typically lasts between 2 to 4 weeks. Other signs and symptoms that can occur include fever, headache, chills and an upset stomach.

#### **What are some possible complications of shingles?**

Occasionally, those who have had shingles will have pain that persists after the rash has cleared. This is called post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN) and can last from 3 months to a year.

If shingles affects the eye, it can cause permanent damage to the retina resulting in vision loss.

#### **Who is at risk?**

The reason the virus reactivates in some individuals is unclear. However, there are some known risk factors:

**Age:** Those over 50 years old are at increased risk. Roughly 50% of those unvaccinated and over 50 will get shingles in their lifetime.

**Weakened Immune System:** Certain medical conditions and medications can weaken the body's natural defenses. This can cause an individual to be more susceptible to shingles. Cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy and HIV/AIDS are examples.

#### **Who SHOULD get the shingles vaccine?**

According to the Centers for Disease Control, the shingles vaccine or Zostavax, is recommended for individuals age 60 or over.

### **Who should NOT get the vaccine?**

A person who has ever had a life-threatening or severe allergic reaction to gelatin, the antibiotic neomycin, or any other component of shingles vaccine. Tell your doctor if you have any severe allergies.

A person who has a weakened immune system because of

- HIV/AIDS or another disease that affects the immune system,
- treatment with drugs that affect the immune system, such as steroids,
- cancer treatment such as radiation or chemotherapy,
- cancer affecting the bone marrow or lymphatic system, such as leukemia or lymphoma.

Women who are or might be pregnant

Please contact your personal care provider (PCP) for additional information.

Ellen Edge, RN

Sources

<http://www.cdc.gov/>

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/>