



In October 2006, the CDC recommended a new shingles vaccine for adults 60 years of age and older. This is the first vaccine recommended for use only in adults, and it will prevent much of the pain and suffering caused by shingles.

Q. What is shingles?

A. Shingles is a disease caused by the same virus that causes chickenpox; it's actually a reawakening of an old chickenpox infection. Shingles most often occurs in elderly people and people of any age with weakened immune systems. Common symptoms of shingles include a rash, usually in a band-like pattern on one side of the body; and severe pain. Sometimes the nerve pain can last for months or years.

Q. How common is shingles?



A. Every year in the United States, shingles affects approximately 1 million people. Individuals have about a 20 to 30 percent chance of getting shingles during their lifetime. Approximately half of those who live to be 85 years old will have one or more encounters with shingles.

Q. How do you get shingles?

A. People don't catch shingles from other people. Only people who have had chickenpox can get shingles. Shingles occurs when chickenpox virus, which can live silently in the nervous system for decades, reawakens. This can be caused by a weakening of the immune system, most commonly from advancing age, but also from other causes such as the AIDS virus, or from immune-suppressive drugs used to treat cancers. Most often, cases of shingles occur among adults who are otherwise healthy.

Q. Is shingles dangerous?

A. Yes. Although people almost never die from shingles, they can be severely hurt by it. Perhaps the most common complication is persistent, long-lived, debilitating nerve pain. The pain can be so severe that it leads to sleeplessness, depression, weight loss, poor eating, and interference with basic daily activities such as dressing, bathing and eating.

The pain of shingles, one of the most common types of pain an adult can suffer, is typically severe and unrelenting and, unfortunately, is largely untreatable.

Shingles can also affect the nerves around the eye area in approximately 15 percent of people with the disease, occasionally causing reduced vision or even blindness. In people with weakened immune systems, the chickenpox virus that causes shingles can at the same time cause hepatitis, pneumonia and encephalitis (infection of the brain).

Scarring and concurrent bacterial infections can also occur at the site of the rash.

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Shingles: What you should know

Q. Is shingles contagious?



A. Yes. Although people with shingles cannot give someone else shingles, they can pass chickenpox virus to others through direct contact with the rash. So if, for example, the grandchildren of someone with shingles have not yet had chickenpox or the chickenpox vaccine, they could become infected with the virus and develop chickenpox. If the rash has yet to develop or has crusted,

it is not likely to be contagious. Also, the risk of spreading is reduced if the rash is covered by dressings or clothing.

Q. How can you avoid shingles?

A. Once a person has had chickenpox, he can get shingles. The only way to prevent it is with the shingles vaccine.

Q. Who should get the shingles vaccine?

A. People who are 60 years of age and older should receive a single dose of the shingles vaccine.

Individuals have about a 20 to 30 percent chance of getting shingles during their lifetime.

Q. How is the shingles vaccine made?

A. The shingles vaccine is a more concentrated version of the chickenpox vaccine that children currently receive. Both are live, weakened forms of chickenpox virus. The shingles vaccine contains about 14 times more of the weakened chickenpox virus than is in the chickenpox vaccine. This amount of virus is needed to induce a protective response in people who have already had chickenpox. Due to the differences in the quantities of virus in each vaccine, they cannot be used interchangeably.

Q. Does the shingles vaccine work?

A. Yes. In research studies, the vaccine protected more than half of the recipients from getting shingles and about two-thirds from getting long-lasting shingles pain.

Q. Is the shingles vaccine safe?



A. Yes. Common side effects include redness, pain, swelling and itching at the injection site. A small group of study participants also got a rash at the injection site.

Q. Should I get the shingles vaccine if I already had shingles in the past?

A. Yes. Experiencing an episode of shingles in the past doesn't prevent someone from getting shingles in the future.

This information is provided by the Vaccine Education Center at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. The Center is an educational resource for parents and healthcare professionals and is composed of scientists, physicians, mothers and fathers who are devoted to the study and prevention of infectious diseases. The Vaccine Education Center is funded by endowed chairs from The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and Kohl's Department Stores. The Center does not receive support from pharmaceutical companies.

This project was completed in collaboration with the American Medical Association.

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