Shingles

Prevention

A Vaccine for Adults 60 and Older

In May 2006, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved a vaccine (Zostavax®) to prevent shingles in people age 60 and older. The vaccine is designed to boost the immune system and protect older adults from getting shingles later on. Even if you have had shingles, you can still get the shingles vaccine to help prevent future occurrences of the disease. There is no maximum age for getting the vaccine, and only a single dose is recommended.

When To Get the Vaccine

The decision on when to get vaccinated should be made with your health care provider. The shingles vaccine is not recommended if you have active shingles or pain that continues after the rash is gone. Although there is no specific time that you must wait after having shingles before receiving the shingles vaccine, you should generally make sure that the shingles rash has disappeared before getting vaccinated.

Where To Get the Vaccine

The shingles vaccine is available in pharmacies and doctor's offices. Talk with your healthcare professional if you have questions about the vaccine.

Who Should Not Get the Vaccine?

You should NOT get the shingles vaccine if you –

* have an active case of shingles or have pain that continues after the rash is gone
* have ever had a life-threatening or severe allergic reaction to gelatin, the antibiotic neomycin, or any other component of the shingles vaccine. Tell your doctor if you have any severe allergies.
* have 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

Could Vaccines Make Shingles a Rare Disease?

The shingles vaccine is basically a stronger version of the chickenpox vaccine, which became available in 1995. The chickenpox shot prevents chickenpox in 70 to 90 percent of those vaccinated, and 95 percent of the rest have only mild symptoms. Millions of children and adults have already received the chickenpox shot.

Interestingly, the chickenpox vaccine may reduce the shingles problem. Widespread use of the chickenpox vaccine means that fewer people will get chickenpox in the future. And if people do not get chickenpox, they cannot get shingles. Use of the shingles and chickenpox vaccines may one day make shingles a rare disease.