Shingles Vaccine
What you need to know

WHAT IS SHINGLES?

- Shingles is a painful skin rash, often with blisters. It is also called Herpes Zoster or just Zoster.
- A shingles rash usually appears on one side of the face or body and lasts from 2 to 4 weeks. Its main symptom is pain which can be quite severe. Other symptoms of shingles can include fever, headache, chills and upset stomach. Very rarely, a shingles infection can lead to pneumonia, hearing problems, blindness, brain inflammation (*encephalitis*) or death.
- For about 1 person in 5, severe pain can continue even after the rash clears up. This is called **post-herpetic neuralgia.**
- Shingles is caused by the Varicella Zoster virus. This is the same virus that causes chickenpox. Only someone who has had a case of chickenpox or rarely, has gotten chickenpox vaccine, can get shingles. The virus stays in your body. It can reappear many years later to cause a case of shingles.
- You cannot catch shingles from another person with shingles. However, a person who has never had chickenpox (or chickenpox vaccine) could get **chickenpox** from someone with shingles. This is not very common.
- Shingles is far more common in people 50 and older than in younger people. It is also more common in people whose immune systems are weakened because of a disease such as cancer or drugs such as steroids or chemotherapy.

SHINGLES VACCINE

- A vaccine for shingles was licensed in 2006. In clinical trials, the vaccine reduced the risk of shingles by 50%. It can also reduce the pain in people who still get shingles after being vaccinated.
- A single dose of shingles vaccine is recommended for adults 60 years of age and older.

SOME PEOPLE SHOULD NOT GET SHINGLES VACCINE OR SHOULD WAIT

A person should not get shingles vaccine who:

- Has ever had a life-threatening **allergic reaction to gelatin, the antibiotic neomycin, or any other component of shingles vaccine.** Tell your doctor if you have any severe allergies.
- Has a weakened immune system because of current:
  - 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.
  - Is pregnant, or might be pregnant. Women should not become pregnant until at least 4 weeks after getting shingles vaccine.

Someone with a minor illness, such as a cold, may be vaccinated. Anyone who is moderately or severely ill should wait until they recover before getting the vaccine. This includes anyone with a temperature of 101.3° F (38° C) or higher.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS FROM SHINGLES VACCINE?

- A vaccine, like any medicine, could possibly cause serious problems such as severe allergic reactions. However, the risk of a vaccine causing serious harm, or death, is extremely small.
- No serious problems have been identified with shingles vaccine.

Mild Problems

- Redness, soreness, swelling, or itching at the site of the injection (about 1 person in 3).

- Headache (about 1 person in 70).

Like all vaccines, shingles vaccine is being closely monitored for unusual or severe problems.

WHAT IF THERE IS A MODERATE OR SEVERE REACTION?

What should I look for?

Any unusual condition, such as a severe allergic reaction or a high fever. If a severe allergic reaction occurred, it would be within a few minutes to an hour after the shot. Signs of a serious allergic reaction can include difficulty breathing, weakness, hoarseness or wheezing, hives, paleness, weakness, a fast heart beat, dizziness or swelling of the throat.

What should I do?

- **Call** a doctor, or get the person to a doctor right away.
- **Tell** your doctor what happened, the date and time it happened, and when the vaccination was given.
- **Ask** your provider to report the reaction by filing a Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) form.

Or you can file this report through the VAERS web site at www.vaers.hhs.gov, or by calling 1-800-822-7967. *VAERS does not provide medical advice.*

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- Your provider can give you the vaccine package insert or suggest other sources of information.
- Call your local or state health department.
- Contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):
  - Call 1-800-232-4636 (1-800-CDC-INFO)
  - Visit CDC's website at www.cdc.gov/vaccines

Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases. October 2009

Document Released: 10/15/2007 Document Re-Released: 03/14/2011
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