

Shot may protect against shingles

February 19 2018

Anyone who has had chickenpox or the chickenpox vaccine is at risk for the painful skin condition herpes zoster, more commonly known as shingles. Both diseases are caused by the varicella-zoster virus, which stays in the body after chickenpox clears and may reactivate later in life.

"The vast majority of the population has the potential to develop shingles," says board-certified dermatologist Lorraine Rosamilia, MD, FAAD, a staff dermatologist at Geisinger Health System in State College, Pa. "Even if you don't remember having chickenpox or getting a shot to prevent it, it's likely the varicella-zoster virus is already in your body; if your [immune system](#) takes a nap, that virus can wake up, resulting in shingles."

While shingles can affect anyone carrying the varicella-zoster virus, Dr. Rosamilia says, it's more likely in people with weakened immune systems, including people older than 50. Fortunately for this population, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved two vaccines to reduce the risk of shingles, one for adults older than 50 and another for adults older than 60.

"If you're over 50 and have had chickenpox, talk to your doctor about getting a vaccine to help prevent shingles," Dr. Rosamilia says. "And if you experience any shingles symptoms, no matter your age, see a doctor as soon as possible."

The first warning sign of shingles is a burning or tingling sensation on a small area of skin, which can feel extremely sensitive. After a few days,

the disease will progress into a painful rash, usually on one side of the face or body. The affected area also may develop fluid-filled blisters.

According to Dr. Rosamilia, early treatment not only can reduce the pain and severity of the disease, but also can help prevent potential side effects like eye problems, infection, and a condition called post-herpetic neuralgia, which causes pain, numbness, itching and tingling. Doctors may prescribe antiviral medication or painkillers to treat shingles, and patients also can relieve their symptoms by applying ice packs or cool, wet cloths; taking cool baths; applying calamine lotion; and wearing loose cotton clothing.

"In most cases, you don't need to worry about being around someone with shingles," Dr. Rosamilia says. "The disease may look contagious, and a lot of people think it is, but you can't catch it from another person. Since it's caused by the reactivation of a virus that's already in your system, the only person you can catch it from is yourself."

While shingles itself cannot spread from person to person, someone who has not had chickenpox or the vaccine could get chickenpox from direct contact with shingles blisters. Dr. Rosamilia recommends that people with [shingles](#) cover their rash with loose, sterile bandages and avoid contact with people for whom catching the [virus](#) could be dangerous, such as newborns, pregnant women who have never had chickenpox or the [chickenpox vaccine](#), and those with [weakened immune systems](#).

More information: F103 - Herpes Zoster: Controversies and Conundrums in Treatment and Prevention.

[www.aad.org/scientificsessions ... etails.aspx?id=11714](http://www.aad.org/scientificsessions...etails.aspx?id=11714)

Provided by American Academy of Dermatology

Citation: Shot may protect against shingles (2018, February 19) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-02-shot-protect-shingles.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.