

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Shingles – Don’t Suffer – Get the Shot!

Almost 1 out of every 3 people in the United States will develop shingles (also known as zoster or herpes zoster) in their lifetime. There are an estimated 1 million cases of shingles each year in this country. Anyone who has recovered from chickenpox may develop shingles; even children can get shingles. However the risk of shingles increases as you get older. About half of all cases occur in men and women 60 years old or older. That’s why the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency is recommending that if you are age 60 years or older, you should get vaccinated against shingles.

Shingles is caused by the varicella zoster virus (VZV), the same virus that causes chickenpox. After a person recovers from chickenpox, the virus stays inactive in the body. For reasons that are not fully known, the virus can reactivate years later and cause shingles.

Shingles, also known as herpes zoster, causes a painful, blistering skin rash that can last 2 to 4 weeks. For some people, the pain associated with the outbreak can last for months or even years after the rash goes away. This pain is called post-herpetic neuralgia or PHN. It is the most common complication of shingles. According to Valarie Newton, Personal Health and Disease Prevention Director with the district health department, “Not only does the risk of getting shingles increase with age, but so does the risk of developing the PHN pain. People have described pain from shingles as excruciating, aching, burning, stabbing, and shock-like. It has been compared to the pain of childbirth or kidney stones.” This pain can lead to depression, anxiety, difficulty concentrating, loss of appetite, and weight loss, and having shingles can interfere with

activities of daily living like dressing, bathing, eating, cooking, shopping, and travel. It can also lead to eye complications that can result in vision loss.

Who is at risk for getting Shingles? Anyone who has ever had chickenpox and who:

- Is over 60 years of age;
- Is receiving treatment for cancer;
- Has a compromised immune system;
- Is taking certain medications (i.e., prednisone or steroids and/or drugs that are given after organ transplantation.)

Shingles cannot be passed from one person to another. However, a person with shingles can transmit the virus that causes shingles to others. A person who gets infected with the virus for the first time will develop chickenpox, not shingles.

How can you protect yourself against shingles? Talk with your doctor or pharmacist about getting the one-time shot. If you are 60 years or older and lack health insurance that covers the shingles vaccination, you may be eligible for a free shot through the Michigan Adult Vaccine Replacement program. The health department has received a limited supply of free vaccine to administer to eligible participants. Call now to learn if you are eligible and to schedule an appointment. This vaccine will be administered on a first come, first served basis until supplies run out. Val adds “Suffering from shingles can be avoided by receiving a simple shot. Don’t suffer needlessly. Get your shot today.”

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