**Herpes Zoster Vaccination**

1. **Recommendation:**

The Advisory Committee for Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends a single dose of zoster (shingles) vaccine for adults 60 years of age or older, whether or not the patient reported a prior episode of shingles. Persons with chronic medical conditions may be vaccinated unless a contraindication or precaution exists for their condition.

When conducting routine zoster vaccination, there is no need to verbally screen for a history of chickenpox infection or to conduct laboratory testing for serologic evidence of prior varicella infection. Furthermore, if a person reports a negative history for varicella, they can still receive the zoster vaccine. Almost all persons 60 years old or older are immune to varicella. This is the basis for ACIP criteria for varicella immunity, which state that persons born in the United States prior to 1980 are considered immune to varicella. For foreign born patients, their varicella antibody levels should be checked, if indicated by varicella history. If serologic evidence of varicella susceptibility becomes available through the patient screening process, the patient should be offered varicella vaccine not zoster vaccine.

1. **Groups NOT Recommended for Zoster Vaccination:**
   * Those with a history of anaphylactic/anaphylactoid reaction to gelatin, neomycin or any other component of the vaccine;
   * Those with a history of primary or acquired immunodeficiency state, including leukemia, lymphoma, or other malignant neoplasm affecting the bone marrow or lymphatic system, or with acquired immunodeficiency syndrome or other clinical manifestation of infection with human immunodeficiency virus;
   * Those receiving immunosuppressive therapy, including high-dose corticosteroids; or
   * Those who are or may be pregnant.
2. **Vaccination for Persons age 50 - 59 Years**

In 2011, the FED expanded the age indication for Zostavax to include adults 50 through 59 years old for preventing herpes zoster. This decision was based on a large study showing that the vaccine reduced the risk of zoster infection by approximately 70 percent.

For persons age 50 through 59 years, the risk of getting shingles and having prolonged pain after shingles is much lower than for people 60 and older. Based on this, the ACIP has not issued a recommendation for routine use of zoster vaccine in adults 50 through 59 years of age; however, healthcare providers may still offer vaccination to those individuals. It might be strongly considered for those patients likely to have a poor tolerance to herpes zoster or postherpetic neuralgia symptoms, for example, patients with pre-existing chronic pain, severe depression or other co-morbidities; those intolerant to treatment medications due to hypersensitivity or interactions with other medications, or those with extenuating employment-related factors.

(Note: No data are available about the effectiveness of zoster vaccine in adults who become immunosuppressed after receiving vaccination).

1. **Vaccine Composition and Administration**

Zostavax consists of attenuated varicella virus at a concentration at least 14 times that found in Varivax, the vaccine to prevent varicella (chickenpox). Zostavax cannot be used in children and cannot be used in place of varicella vaccine. Zostavax is administered subcutaneously as a single dose and should not be administered intra-muscularly. However, it is not necessary to repeat vaccination if the vaccine is administered intramuscularly.

1. **Vaccine Safety**

The prevalence of adverse events was similar in vaccine and placebo groups, and no vaccine-related deaths have been reported. The most commonly reported side effects were erythema, pain or tenderness, swelling and pruritis at the injection site.

It is reportedly safe to be in contact with infants, young children, pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems following shingles vaccination. There is no documentation of a person getting chickenpox from someone who received the shingles vaccination.

**References**

Dept. of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Herpes Zoster Vaccination for Health Care Professionals”, Jan. 2011.

Dept. of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Shingles Vaccination: What you need to know”, Jan. 2011.