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November 30, 2012

Shingles, Is It Really That Bad?

Ask anyone who has had a case of shingles and you're likely to hear it was the most painful disease they have ever had, possibly described as an excruciating or horrific experience. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) says that 1 in 3 people will have a shingles attack sometime in their life.

Shingles, also known as herpes zoster, will result in a painful rash with blisters that will eventually crust over in about 7-10 days. It is typically found on the face, back, or chest area but can show up on many areas of the body. Other symptoms that can occur include fever, chills, headache, and upset stomach. Further complications that may happen include a serious bacterial infection, scarring, and nerve damage. Chronic severe pain continues for months in some and those with shingles affecting the eye area can actually have some vision loss.

Shingles continues to be a mysterious disease to many. Here are some frequently asked questions and answers to help you understand it better.

True or False: Only old people get shingles.

False. The virus causing shingles occurs from a person having had chickenpox. While shingles is seen more often in the older adult and the risk increases with age, everyone who has had chickenpox is at risk of suddenly developing shingles.

True or False: You can get shingles from another person.

False. You cannot get shingles from another person. The liquid in the blisters on someone who has shingles can potentially give chickenpox to someone who has never had it before but not shingles. It is best to keep the rash covered until all blisters are crusted over.

True or False: You can only get shingles once.

False. People have had reoccurring episodes of shingles. Most people will only have it once but some have had it twice and even three times. Having this disease once is bad enough but having it several times can be very upsetting.

True or False: You should stay at home while you have shingles.

False. You do not need to stay at home if you feel good enough to go out. There are some people you should avoid if you have shingles including pregnant women who have never had chickenpox, small infants, and those who have weakened immune systems with serious illnesses like cancer or HIV.



True or False: There is no cure for shingles.

True. There is no cure for shingles but there are medicines that can be taken to help ease the symptoms. To help prevent episodes of shingles one must prevent infection with chickenpox. For those who have never had chickenpox, there is a vaccination available to prevent it. If you have already had chicken pox, there is a vaccination to help decrease your risk of getting shingles or decrease the severity of the disease.

True or False: The shingles vaccine is a safe vaccine.

True. The vaccine is a safe vaccine and has been given to lots of people without any serious side effects identified. Redness, soreness, swelling, or itching can occur at the injection site.

True or False: The shingles vaccine needs to be repeated every year.

Unlike the influenza vaccination, the shingles vaccination is a one time shot. Once you have received the shot, make sure you keep a record of when you received it so you don't accidentally get it again.

True or False: You should not get the shingles vaccine if you aren't sure you have had chickenpox.

False: It is assumed that most people born in the United States before 1970 have had chickenpox putting them at risk for shingles. If you have not had chickenpox, getting the shingles vaccine will not hurt you but it probably won't help you. If you have been vaccinated with the chickenpox vaccine and have not had chickenpox disease, the shingles vaccine is not recommended for you.

True or False: All insurance companies cover the shingles vaccine.

False. Not all insurance companies will cover the vaccine and of those insurance companies that do, most will only cover if you are over the age of 60. You should call your insurance company to see if it is covered before getting vaccinated. The shingles vaccine is an expensive vaccine.

True or False: You can only get the vaccine at your doctor's office.

False. Many pharmacies and even some health departments provide the vaccine. You should call around to see who has it, the cost of the vaccine and if they take your insurance plan before arriving to get vaccinated.

Don't take your chances with shingles as you get older. It really is that bad! For more information on shingles, talk to your doctor or you can go to the following websites:

www.shinglesinfo.com

<http://www.cdc.gov/shingles/about/overview.html>