Trust Us: if you're over 60, get your shingles vaccine

By ACSH Staff — January 12, 2011

Shingles is an often painful and blistering skin rash caused by the varicella-zoster virus — the same virus responsible for chickenpox — and is most common in people over 50. That's why a new study on Merck & Co.'s Zostavax shingles vaccine [1] published in the Journal of the American Medical Association brings good news as results reveal that the shot reduces the risk of shingles in older patients by 55 percent.

Data collected from Kaiser Permanente's insurance program on 75,761 adults who received the vaccine and 227,283 unvaccinated subjects showed that vaccinated people had a 63 percent lower risk of ophthalmic herpes zoster and a 65 percent reduced risk of hospitalization. But, despite its beneficial effects, the shingles vaccine only reached 6.7 percent of Americans ages 60 and older by 2008, CDC researchers reported in the February issue of the American Journal of Preventive Medicine.

"This means that 93.7 percent of older people are unprotected from a potentially painful and chronic condition that increases in severity with age," says ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross. "When shingles occurs in older adults, it’s present as an irritating rash and can cause a chronic neuropathic-type pain called post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN), which is quite annoying and cannot be treated with routine analgesics. In more severe cases, the disease can spread to the ocular nerves, causing eruptions in the cornea and visual impairment. Though it may not kill anyone, shingles can adversely impact the quality of life for some patients, which is why we have to increase the rate of vaccination among older adults by at least ten-fold."

COPYRIGHT © 1978-2016 BY THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON SCIENCE AND HEALTH

Source URL: https://www.acsh.org/news/2011/01/12/trust-us-if-youre-over-60-get-your-shingles-vaccine

Links