Hello and welcome to the Island Drug PodCast for the week of September 14th, 2009. My name is Dr. Kit Worley; I am the pharmacy manager at Island Drug in Clinton, Washington. In addition to the annual flu shot, Island Drug pharmacists administer a variety of vaccines, many of which can be given at the same visit. Today I will focus specifically on Zostavax, the vaccine for Shingles. We will review what Shingles is, who gets it, and how vaccinating can help.

Shingles is a disease caused by the same virus that causes chickenpox. In the United States, 90% of adults have had chickenpox. If you’ve had chickenpox, the virus stays inactive in you body for many years. If it becomes active again the chickenpox virus can give you Shingles. So, if you have had chickenpox, as many of us have, you are at risk for Shingles.

Shingles, also called herpes zoster, is a painful rash that usually occurs on one side of the body or face. Itching, burning and/or tingling in the area of the rash are common early signs of shingles. The rash can take two to four weeks to heal and, although, the pain lessens as it heals, some people have pain that lasts for months or even years.

Long term nerve pain, also referred to as postherpetic neuralgia, is the most common complication that occurs after Shingles. This pain can be moderate to severe, with some people reporting that even the touch of soft clothing is painful. Along with pain, other serious complications of Shingles include; scarring, skin infections, muscle weakness, paralysis on one side of the face, and decrease or loss of vision or hearing.

It is estimated that, in the United States, there are 1 million cases of Shingles each year. Almost half of those cases occur in adults 60 years of age or older, and 50% of people...
living to age 85 have had Shingles. Increasing age and decreased immunity can increase your risk for developing Shingles. However, there is no way to know who will get Shingles or when it will occur.

So, you may be asking what you can do to help protect yourself or your loved ones against Shingles. Zostavax, the Shingles vaccine, was licensed in 2006 and it is indicated for all those 60 years of age and older to help prevent Shingles. It is intended to help your immune system in preventing you from getting Shingles. In clinical trials, it has been shown to prevent Shingles in about half of people 60 years of age or older. If you do get Shingles even though you have been vaccinated, Zostavax may help reduce the duration of pain associated with Shingles. Zostavax is not intended for the treatment of Shingles infections.

Here are some key points regarding the vaccine:

- Zostavax is given as a single dose by an injection under the skin, usually in the upper arm.
- At Island Drug, we administer Zostavax year round and could give it the same day as a flu vaccine.
- If you have already had shingles or are unsure if you have had chickenpox, it is still recommended that you receive the shingles vaccination.
- You need a prescription from your doctor only if you are under 60 years of age.
- You should not get Zostavax if you are allergic to any of its ingredients, including gelatin or neomycin, have a weakened immune system, take high doses of steroids, have an active tuberculosis infection, or are pregnant or plan to become pregnant.
- Possible side effects include redness, pain, itching, swelling, warmth, or bruising at the injection site, as well as headache.
- Zostavax contains a weakened chickenpox virus. Tell your health care provider if you will be in close contact with newborn infants, someone who may be pregnant and has not had chickenpox or been vaccinated against chickenpox, or someone who has problems with their immune system. Your health care provider can tell you what situations you need to avoid.

Please don’t hesitate to call Island Drug at anytime with questions, and remember we are available to administer Shingles shots whenever our stores are open; making Island Drug our most convenient vaccination destination. Additional information may also be found on the internet at islanddrug.com, shinglesinfo.com and zostavax.com. Thank you for tuning into this weeks pod cast, I hope you will do so again next week.

References: