

Letter from the Industrial Physician



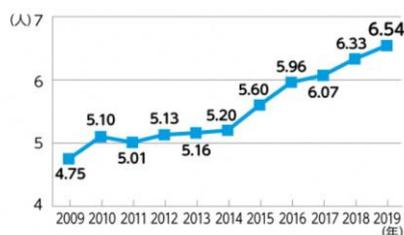
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Shingles vaccination after the age of 50.

The number of shingles patients is increasing each year (Figure). The incidence of shingles increases at age 50 and older, with approximately one in three people experiencing shingles by age 80. Furthermore, it has been reported that approximately 50% of those who survive to age 85 experience shingles. The pain of shingles is a neuralgia caused by the varicella-zoster virus (VZV) attacking the nerves and is characterized by a sharp or burning pain that differs from common skin pain. Patients who have experienced this disease say that it was painful. Although it is one of the diseases that we do not want to get if possible, it is said that more than 90% of Japanese people are infected with VZV. Although being infected does not always cause symptoms, the risk of developing the disease increases when immunity is weakened due to aging (risk increases for those over 50), fatigue, stress, illness (diabetes, cancer, HIV, etc.), use of immunosuppressive or anticancer drugs, lack of sleep or irregular lifestyle, etc. One response is vaccination. Even for those who were vaccinated against chickenpox as children, antibody titer declines as they age, so it is recommended that they be vaccinated against shingles again after the age of 50. If, unluckily, one develops the disease, antiviral drugs and painkillers are used. In this case, common painkillers (e.g., Loxonin) may be effective, but if the pain is severe, they are not sufficient and medication that works well for nerve pain is needed. The tricky part is the sequela called postherpetic neuralgia (PHN). In this case, the pain is prolonged and neuropathic pain medications such as pregabalin (Lyrica) and tramadol (Tramset) are needed.

Per 1,000 population Changes in the incidence of shingles



Ref: Daiju Life Insurance Company HP

In addition, while shingles itself can be recovered with treatment, the VZV that causes it cannot be completely eliminated from the body. In other words, once contracted, the virus continues to incubate in the ganglia, so complete radical cure (complete elimination of the virus) is not possible.

In Japan, on the other hand, the chickenpox vaccine was approved in 1986, and vaccination began the following year, becoming a routine

vaccination in 2014. As a result, there are many uninfected people in the younger generation.

This vaccination is effective against chickenpox in children, but first-time VZV infection in uninfected adults is known to be more severe than in children. It is particularly prone to complications such as pneumonia, and in immunocompromised patients, it can progress to severe chickenpox with multiple organ failure, coagulation disorders, and in the worst cases, death.

Conclusions. Whether you were vaccinated as a child and have never had chickenpox or have had chickenpox, it is safe and secure to consider the shingles vaccine after the age of 50. In addition, getting enough sleep and rest, eating a well-balanced diet (B vitamins help repair nerves), avoiding stress, and maintaining a strong immune system are always required.