

Article for Consumer Stakeholder Groups – Shingles disease awareness

Shingles and what older Australians need to know to protect their health

Shingles is caused by the varicella zoster virus, the same virus that causes chickenpox. After chickenpox, the varicella zoster virus lays dormant in the nerves and can reactivate at any time, most commonly in older age, causing shingles.^{1,2}

It is characterised by a blistering rash which appears as a band or belt on one side of the body,³ however shingles is not just a rash. Some people affected by shingles also experience severe, chronic and debilitating nerve pain, that can last for months or even years, known as postherpetic neuralgia (PHN).^{3,4} This pain has been described as throbbing, burning, stabbing and sharp.^{3,5}

New survey findings released in August 2017* show almost half of older Australians between the ages of 70 and 79 are failing to adequately look after their health, and worryingly seven out of ten 70-79 year olds do not know they are at high risk of shingles.⁶

Patti Newton, well-loved Australian in her 70s, a grandparent and someone who has experienced the pain and debilitating nature of shingles first hand, said “this new research shows that older Australians need to get better at protecting our health and making sure we are a bit more selfish when it comes to our own health. As a mum and grandmother, I need to make sure I stay fit and healthy so I can be there for my family and maximise my quality of life. It’s important that we speak to our doctor about Government funded shingles prevention and treatment options.”

The new research also uncovered that over a quarter (27%) of 70-79 year old Australians have had shingles,⁶ a condition not only more common over the age of 70, but with an increased chance of complications at this age.²

Geriatrician Associate Professor Michael Woodward AM said, “Shingles can strike at any time and we don’t know how severe it will be when it hits.² We do know that the chance of developing shingles, along with the risk of complications, increase with age, particularly over the age of 70.”²

“Although there is no cure for shingles and we know one in three may develop shingles in their lifetime.³ Additionally 40% of Australians aged 70-79 are not aware that there are Government funded shingles prevention and treatment options,”⁶ A/Prof Woodward continued.

The research also found 60% of 70-79 year olds admit to not eating a balanced diet,⁶ over half (52%) are drinking more alcohol than recommended,⁶ and almost half (49%) are not maintaining an active lifestyle.⁶ Additionally, just under half of this group (46%) prioritise the importance of the health of other family members over their own personal health.⁶



More about shingles

- 97% of Australian adults have been exposed to the chicken pox virus and are therefore at risk of shingles.¹
- Shingles can also lead to other complications such as bacterial skin infection, neurological complications and may also increase the risk of stroke in the following six months.^{3,7}
- The new research found that of the estimated 387,000 70-79 year olds that have had shingles, 41% also suffered from nerve pain or PHN.⁶

Further Information

For more information about shingles, PHN and for information about government funded prevention and treatment options, please speak to your doctor.

Notes to editor:

Dr Woodward has served on advisory boards sponsored by Seqirus for which he has received compensation. In relation to this Seqirus media announcement, no compensation was provided to Dr Woodward, and the opinions expressed are his own.

Patti Newton has received compensation for her involvement in this media activity.

About Seqirus

Seqirus, a CSL company, is a leading provider of essential vaccines, pharmaceutical products and diagnostic reagents. We have served Australia's healthcare needs for over a century and today we operate Australia's only local manufacturing facility for seasonal and pandemic influenza vaccine. Seqirus produces a range of unique medicines in the National Interest, and also in-licences a broad range of paediatric and adult vaccines and specialty pharmaceutical products. With the extensive research and production expertise and manufacturing plants in US, UK, and Australia, Seqirus is driven by the promise it shares with parent company, CSL Limited, to provide medicines that help to protect and save lives.

Seqirus is part of CSL Limited (ASX:CSL), headquartered in Melbourne, Australia. The CSL Group of companies employs more than 17,000 people with operations in more than 30 countries. For more information visit www.seqirus.com.au and www.csl.com.au

*About the consumer research

Galaxy Research conducted this study with an online panel between Friday 2nd June and Monday 5th June 2017. The sample was 1,000 Australians aged 70-79 years old, distributed across Australia.

References:

1. Stein A N. et al. 2009. Herpes zoster burden of illness and health care resource utilisation in the Australian population aged 50 years and older. *Vaccine*. Vol 27, pp. 520-29.
2. NCIRS Herpes Zoster Factsheet August 2017 http://www.ncirs.edu.au/assets/provider_resources/factsheets/zoster-vaccine-fact-sheet.pdf Accessed August 2017.
3. Harpaz R et al. Prevention of Herpes Zoster. Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunisation Practices (ACIP) *MMRW* 2008 Jun 6;57 (RR-5):1-30.
4. Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI). The Australian immunisation handbook 10th ed (2017 update). Canberra: Australian Government Department of Health, 2017



5. Oxman M N. 2000. Varicella-zoster virus: virology and clinical management. Cambridge University Press. Ch 13 pp. 246-275.
6. Seqirus Data on File. Galaxy Consumer Research. June 2017
7. Langan SM et al. 2014 Risk of Stroke Following Herpes Zoster: A Self-Controlled Case Series Study; 58: 1497-1503.

Seqirus™ is a trademark of Seqirus UK Limited or its affiliates. Seqirus (Australia) Pty Ltd. ABN 66 120 398 067, 63 Poplar Road Parkville, Victoria 3052. Date of preparation August 2017.
SEQ/ZOST/0817/0257