

ZOSTAVAX[®] patient handout generic name: zoster vaccine live

Commentary

ZOSTAVAX[®] vaccine and how it works

ZOSTAVAX[®], a vaccine licensed by the FDA, helps patients reduce the risk of getting herpes zoster (also known as shingles), in patients 50 years and older. ZOSTAVAX[®] decreases the risk of recurrence of the varicella zoster virus, the same virus that causes the chickenpox. The varicella zoster virus (chickenpox) may remain dormant in the body when patients recover for any number of years. The mechanism of ZOSTAVAX[®] is to help your immune system protect you from getting shingles. You may still get shingles even though you have been vaccinated, however ZOSTAVAX[®] may help counteract the nerve pain that can develop from shingles in some patients. ZOSTAVAX[®] should not be used to treat shingles or the nerve pain that may result once you have it.

The virus that causes shingles and what is crucial to know

Anybody who has had the varicella zoster virus (chickenpox) is at risk for acquiring shingles. The varicella zoster virus can remain in your nervous system for many years and remains dormant. Research has been done and although it's not fully understood, the virus may become active again and give you shingles. The elderly and/or a lowered immune system may increase your probabilities of getting shingles. Shingles is a rash or blisters that emerge on the skin, typically on one side of the body. The rash may be painful and long-lasting for some patients. Shingles rashes typically last for up to 30 days and, for most people, the pain from the rash reduces as it heals.

What population should not get ZOSTAVAX[®]?

Don't get ZOSTAVAX[®] if you:

- i. Are allergic to any of the components in the vaccine
- ii. Are allergic to gelatin or neomycin
- iii. Have a weaker immune system caused by radiation, corticosteroids, AIDS and/or cancer of the lymph, bone or blood because ZOSTAVAX[®] is a live vaccine and may cause complications when you're immunocompromised
- iv. Are pregnant or plan to become pregnant
- v. You should not get ZOSTAVAX[®] to inhibit chickenpox. ZOSTAVAX[®] is a live vaccine that contains a weakened strain of the varicella zoster virus (chickenpox). This will give you the chickenpox and can later surface as shingles
- vi. ZOSTAVAX[®] is not for children and shouldn't be a substitute for VARIVAX[®], the vaccine used to prevent chickenpox in children.
- vii. Patients who are in close contact with pregnant women and have not had chickenpox should talk to their physician or pharmacist to decide if using ZOSTAVAX[®] is right for them. Pregnant women, according to the CDC, are told to wait to receive the chickenpox vaccine until after giving birth. For instance, after an

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individual receives the ZOSTAVAX[®] vaccine and visits a pregnant woman who has never had the chickenpox. If she comes in direct contact with that individual with an active shingles rash while it is still blistering, then she can get chickenpox, which is contraindicated during pregnancy

- viii. Are less than 50 years old because there is not enough evidence from the clinical trials to determine the risks and benefits of using ZOSTAVAX[®]

How is ZOSTAVAX[®] given?

ZOSTAVAX[®] is given as a one-time intramuscular injection, preferably in the upper arm, in the pharmacy by a licensed and certified pharmacist.

Information that your Health Care Provider needs to Administer the ZOSTAVAX[®] Vaccine

Your physician or pharmacist should know about any medical conditions or any of the following:

- i. Any medications, including non-prescription medications and over-the-counter dietary supplements
- ii. Have any allergies, especially allergies to neomycin or gelatin
- iii. Had an allergic reaction to vaccines
- iv. Are pregnant or plan to become pregnant

Inform your physician or pharmacist if you anticipate being in close contact with newborn infants, somebody who may be pregnant and has never had the chickenpox or been vaccinated against chickenpox or somebody who has a lowered immune system. Your physician or pharmacist can tell you what to avoid after being vaccinated.

The Possible Side Effects of ZOSTAVAX[®]

The most common side effects that patients in the clinical experiments reported after getting the vaccine are:

- a. **Injection site reactions:** redness, pain, itching, swelling, hard lump, warmth or bruising where the shot was given

b. Headache

If you experience any difficulty breathing or swallowing, this may be a serious allergic reaction. You should call your doctor right away if you experience an allergic reaction.

Additional side effects have been reported with ZOSTAVAX®:

- i. Chickenpox
- ii. Fever
- iii. Hives at the site of injection
- iv. Joint pain
- v. Muscle pain
- vi. Nausea
- vii. Rash
- viii. Rash at the site of injection

ix. Shingles

- x. Swollen glands near the site of injection (lasting a few days up to a few weeks)

Is ZOSTAVAX® Administered with other Vaccines?

Discuss with your physician or pharmacist if you plan to get ZOSTAVAX® at the same time as the flu vaccine. Discuss with your physician or pharmacist if you plan to get ZOSTAVAX® at the same time as PNEUMOVAX® 23 asit may be better to get these vaccines no less than 4 weeks apart.

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Conflict of interest

Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.