Q & A
By Paul Margulies, M.D., FACE, FACP

Q. My sister has Addison’s disease and wants to know if she should have the Shingles vaccine.

A. There is no contraindication to shingles vaccination in Addisonian patients. Since the risk of getting the infection is no different from the rest of the population, each person should consider the risk of disease versus the benefit.

From a question sent in by a NADF member:

“I would like information on shingles and Addisons disease. I have heard different views on having the shingles vaccine. I have heard from a physician that since I take steroids (hydrocortisone) that I should not have the vaccine. Another doctor felt the vaccine was fine, but did not say why or why not. I have also called a local hospital (one of US News and World Reports’ top 10). Their view was a resounding “no”. I would like the current feeling on shingles vaccine for Addisons disease patients…the whys and why nots. I do not want to make a mistake. I will wait your answer. Thank you.”

Answer from Dr. Margulies:

“I am neutral on advising people to get the shingles vaccination. There is no reason an Addisonian should have any reaction to the vaccination, or have any problem getting the full benefit. The use of replacement steroids does not prevent its use. The basic issue is the likelihood of getting shingles versus the expense of getting the shot. Anyone who is fearful of shingles or wants to have the vaccination should go ahead and get it. This is in contrast to influenza immunization, where I strongly favor universal use of the shots because the benefit is very high and the cost is minimal.”

Question asked by a member, but not yet published in the NADF News®:

“…Further, if you feel that it would be beneficial to get a Zotavax vaccination, what precautions do I need to take before getting the shot? Should I take extra Cortef before taking the shot? If so how much?…”

Answer from Dr. Margulies:

There should be no need to take extra steroids for the shingles vaccination. Any reaction should be mild.
And another:

“Our senior center in Attleboro, Ma is giving free shingle shots. My husband and I have both had the shingles. He had a serious case, and mine was mild. I am the one with primary Addison’s. (Schmidt’s syndrome). Should we get the shingles shot or is it unnecessary? Thank you,”

Answer from Dr. Margulies:

“Having had shingles in the past, the immunization shot will not give you any more immunity than you already have.”

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