Shingles Disease

Why in News?

A new global study finds that 56.6% of Indian participants aged 50 and above know little to nothing about shingles, even though more than 90% of persons over 50 have this virus in their body and are vulnerable.

- **Conducted by** – Ipsos, on behalf of GlaxoSmithKline Pharmaceuticals Ltd.
- **Key Findings** - The survey findings highlight limited awareness of age-related health risks, particularly among individuals with pre-existing health conditions.
- The worldwide online survey involved 8,400 adults aged between 50 years and 60 years, including 500 respondents from India.
- However, only 49.8% express significant concern about developing shingles.
- Globally, only 44% of respondents had some familiarity with shingles.
- On a global level, 54% of participants had chronic conditions, but only 13% expressed significant concern about shingles.
- While anyone who has had chickenpox can get shingles, it becomes more common as one age, ***especially after 50.***
- Several factors can increase the risk of developing shingles, including a weakened immune system, which can be caused by chronic health conditions.
- In Karnataka, there is no data available on shingles, as 463 cases of chickenpox have been reported from January till February 27 this year. Last year, the State had reported 1,607 chickenpox cases.
- **Contributing Factors in Karnataka -** stress work culture, erratic sleep patterns, and rising cases of lifestyle-related immunosuppression.
- Bengaluru’s climate with fluctuating temperatures and high humidity can trigger viral reactivation in susceptible individuals.

Shingles Awareness Week (February 24 – March 2, 2025) observed recently.

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• Shingles is a ***painful disease*** that can have serious and long-lasting complications.
• **Caused by -** The reactivation of the ***varicella-zoster virus (VZV)***, the same virus that causes chickenpox.
• **High risk groups –** Adults aged 50 and above.
• By age 50, most adults will have the VZV dormant in their nervous system, and may reactivate with advancing age.
• As people age increases, the strength of the immune response to infection decreases, increasing the risk of developing shingles.
• **Symptoms -** Shingles rashes often flared up as blisters, very similar to chicken pox and could occur in a *linear distribution* on one side of the body.
• The pain is often described as aching, burning, stabbing or shock-like.
• Following the rash, a person can also experience ***post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN)***, a long-lasting nerve pain that can last weeks or months and can occasionally persist for several years.
• PHN is the most common complication of shingles, occurring in 5-30% of all shingles cases depending on the individual's age.
• **Prevention** - A safe and effective vaccine is available to prevent shingles and its complications.
• **Treatment** - Antiviral medications can reduce the severity and duration of shingles, especially if started early.

Reference

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