



ZOSTAVAX™ APPROVED IN CANADA

THE FIRST AND ONLY VACCINE FOR THE PREVENTION OF SHINGLES

TORONTO, Ontario – August 26, 2008 – Adult Canadians will soon have the opportunity to protect themselves against shingles – a reactivation of the virus that causes chickenpox. Merck Frosst Canada Ltd. announced today the Health Canada approval of ZOSTAVAX™ for the prevention of shingles (herpes zoster) in individuals 60 years of age or older. The vaccine should be available sometime in 2009 through Canadian physicians and pharmacists.

“Anyone who has been infected with the chickenpox virus is at risk of developing shingles, and about 95 per cent of Canadians have been infected by the age of 15,” said Dr. Alison McGeer, Microbiologist and Infectious Disease Specialist at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto. “Shingles is a disease that starts with a painful skin rash and can lead to weeks, months or even years of severe, debilitating nerve pain. Shingles is common, unpredictable and very distressing for both those who get it and their families. Until now there was no way to prevent shingles, so the new vaccine is a welcome development.”

The painful reality of shingles

When people suffer from shingles, they may initially feel itching, tingling, burning or pain¹ in a defined section of their skin and within a few days a characteristic skin rash with fluid-filled blisters appears. For most people, the pain associated with a shingles rash usually lessens as it heals. However, for more than 50 per cent of shingles sufferers over 60, shingles can progress into debilitating pain called post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN)², which can persist long after the blisters have healed.

“Shingles has dramatically changed my life for the worse,” says Andy Vallière from Oshawa, Ontario. “I couldn’t go on with my daily activities and since the doctors were not able to diagnose the disease early on in the process, I truly thought I was dying. It has been two and a half years that I have symptoms and I am still suffering to this day.”

“In March 2000, I became ill with shingles. Today I regret that at the time I was not aware of the painful consequences of this illness,” says Rachel Weisz from Toronto, Ontario. “Eight and a half years later I have to cope with unrelenting pain and am still searching for relief.”

Serious complications

In addition to severe pain, shingles can cause fatigue, disrupted sleep, social withdrawal and depression³, and 50 to 72 per cent of people with shingles of the eye suffer from recurrent ocular disease and vision loss⁴. Up to 10 per cent of shingles patients 65 and older are hospitalized⁵ with an average length of stay of 20 days⁶. PHN – debilitating pain – is the most common serious complication of shingles⁷.

“As you get older, your body cannot defend itself against the shingles-causing virus as well as it could when you were younger, so that your chances of getting shingles increases with age,” explained Dr. McGeer. “In fact, two out of three cases of shingles occur in people over 50. This newest adult vaccine will contribute to keeping Canadian adults healthy and active.”

64 per cent efficacy in people aged 60 to 69

ZOSTAVAX™ is a powder form of the Oka/Merck strain of live varicella-zoster virus that is attenuated, meaning it can no longer cause disease. The vaccine uses essentially the same ingredients as VARIVAX®, Merck Frosst's chickenpox vaccine, but has higher potency in order to induce a significant immune response to varicella-zoster virus in older adults⁸.

In the Shingles Prevention Study (SPS) of 38,546 subjects 60 years of age or older, the new shingles vaccine reduced the risk of developing herpes zoster compared with placebo by 64 per cent in people aged 60 to 69⁹ and by 51 per cent for all age groups¹⁰. The vaccine also reduced the incidence of severe and long-lasting zoster-associated pain by 73 per cent compared with placebo¹¹. In addition, among vaccinated individuals who developed zoster, the vaccine reduced zoster-associated pain compared with placebo by 22 per cent¹².

In clinical studies, the most common side effects reported were redness, pain, swelling, itching, warmth and bruising at the injection site.¹³ The overall incidence of vaccine-related injection-site adverse experiences was significantly greater for subjects vaccinated with ZOSTAVAX™ compared to placebo (48 per cent for the vaccine and 17 per cent for placebo).¹⁴ Headache, fever and allergic reactions were also reported.¹⁵

It is estimated that nearly one in three people will develop shingles in their lifetime¹⁶ and up to one in two for people who reach age 85¹⁷. There is no way to predict if and when the varicella zoster virus will reactivate or who will develop shingles¹⁸.

About Merck Frosst

At Merck Frosst, patients come first. Merck Frosst Canada Ltd. is a research-driven pharmaceutical company discovering, developing and marketing a broad range of innovative medicines and vaccines to improve human health. Merck Frosst is one of the top 25 R&D investors in Canada, with an investment of close to \$110 million in 2007. More information about Merck Frosst is available at <http://www.merckfrosst.com>

Forward-Looking Statement

This press release contains "forward-looking statements" as that term is defined in the Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995. These statements are based on management's current expectations and involve risks and uncertainties, which may cause results to differ materially from those set forth in the statements. The forward-looking statements may include statements regarding product development, product potential or financial performance. No forward-looking statement can be guaranteed, and actual results may differ materially from those projected. Merck undertakes no obligation to publicly update any forward-looking statement, whether as a result of new information, future events, or otherwise. Forward-looking statements in this press release should be evaluated together with the many uncertainties that affect Merck's business, particularly those mentioned in the cautionary statements in Item 1 of Merck's Form 10-K for the year ended Dec. 31, 2006, and in its periodic reports on Form 10-Q and Form 8-K, which the Company incorporates by reference.

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- ⁵ Product Monograph for Health Canada dated August 21, 2008. Page 10.
- ⁶ Weir, E. Vaccination boosts adult immunity to varicella zoster virus. *CMAJ*, August 2, 2005; 173(3). (Web site accessed at: <http://www.cmaj.ca/cgi/content/full/173/3/249?maxtoshow=&HITS=10&hits=10&RESULTFORMAT=&fulltext=shingles+vaccine&andorexactfulltext=and&searchid=1&FIRSTINDEX=0&sortspec=relevance&resourceype=HWCIT>)
- ⁷ Product Monograph for Health Canada dated August 21, 2008. Page 10.
- ⁸ National PBM Drug Monograph: Zoster Vaccine, Varicella Virus Vaccine Live (Oka / Merck) (Zostavax®). November 2006. VHA Pharmacy Benefits Management Strategic Healthcare Group and the Medical Advisory Panel. Page 3. (Web site accessed at: <http://www.pbm.va.gov/monograph/Zoster%20Vaccine.%20Monograph.pdf>)
- ⁹ Product Monograph for Health Canada dated August 21, 2008. Page 15.
- ¹⁰ IBID. Page 15.
- ¹¹ IBID. Page 17.
- ¹² IBID. Page 17.
- ¹³ IBID. Page 23.
- ¹⁴ IBID. Page 6.
- ¹⁵ IBID. Page 23.
- ¹⁶ Brisson M et al. Epidemiology of varicella zoster virus infection in Canada and the United Kingdom. *Epidemiol Infect* 2001;127:305-14.
- ¹⁷ Katz J, et al. Acute pain in herpes zoster and its impact on health-related quality of life. *Clin Infect Dis* 2004;39:342-8.
- ¹⁸ International Council of Nurses Web site. (Web site accessed at: http://www.icn.ch/matters_shingles.htm)