

Episode 20 – Shingles

With Dr. Frank Welch

Clay (00:00):

Today you'll learn everything you need to know about the shingles virus in one place, and that place is Vax Matters.

Diane (00:14):

Well folks, you'll be hearing a familiar voice today. If you've been following Vax Matters from the beginning, and we sure hope you have. We're pleased to welcome back Dr. Frank Welch onto our show to lend his expertise to our discussion of the shingles virus. For those who don't know, Dr. Welch is an immunization expert and the former medical director for emergency preparedness at the Louisiana Department of Health. Thank you so much for joining us again, Dr. Welch.

Dr. Welch (00:45):

Thank you for having me.

Diane (00:47):

It is our pleasure. So, I guess we're going to start with the obvious question. What is shingles, we hear a lot about it, and where does this disease come from?

Dr. Welch (00:58):

Shingles is actually kind of really interesting. It comes from the virus herpes zoster, which most people know as the chickenpox virus. And, uh, what the virus does when you get chickenpox, is cause chickenpox, and then you recover from it, but the funny thing is, the virus never really completely goes out of your body or dies. It actually hangs out in the back of your spinal cord along some of the sensory nerves. And then as we get older, when other triggers may happen during your life, other things that may decrease your immune system, or stress or something, some of that chickenpox virus decides to come back alive, and since it's in a nerve root, it crawls out along that nerve and causes a blistering rash where you have that sensory nerve. So really, shingles is reactivation of the chickenpox you had as a child.

Diane (02:03):

So only the people who have had chickenpox, they're the only folks that can get shingles?

Dr. Welch (02:09):

Y- you are correct. Chickenpox, or very, very rarely the chickenpox vaccine, but only people who had chickenpox-

Diane (02:20):

Hm.

Dr. Welch (02:20):

... Can get shingles.

Clay (02:22):

That's so interesting. And w... I- i... I find the whole th... chickenpox and shingles conversation fascinating, so [inaudible 00:02:28], I've never had chickenpox in my entire life.

Diane (02:31):

You've never had chickenpox?

Clay (02:32):

Never had chickenpox.

Diane (02:33):

Wow.

Clay (02:33):

And I don't know if that's a good thing or bad thing-

Dr. Welch (02:35):

(Laughs).

Clay (02:35):

... And the expression on Doc's face makes me a little terrified-

Diane (02:38):

(Laughs).

Clay (02:38):

... But I'm not gonna ask him about it right now (laughs). Um, wha-

Diane (02:42):

Wow.

Clay (02:42):

But, i-

Diane (02:43):

Even as a baby you know you didn't have-

Clay (02:44):

I never had it.

Diane (02:45):

Okay.

Clay (02:47):

Does that make me an anomaly?

Dr. Welch (02:47):

Uh, can I ask you a quick question there?

Clay (02:49):

Yeah.

Dr. Welch (02:50):

Wh- what year were you born in?

Clay (02:51):

(Laughs) my God.

Diane (02:53):

(Laughs). Okay, here yeah go.

Clay (02:55):

Let's- let's just say-

Diane (02:55):

Full disclosure.

Clay (02:55):

... Let's say... back in the '70s. All right? Way back in the '70s.

Dr. Welch (02:58):

There we go. I was gonna say, was it- was it before 1980?

Clay (03:02):

It was way before 1980.

Dr. Welch (03:05):

Okay. So, uh, about 98% of people, whether you knew it or not, be... Born before 1980 actually had chickenpox.

Clay (03:14):

Oh. Huh. That's interesting. So you mentioned the shingles and some of the factors that exacerbate it after having chickenpox, one of which, you said, was stress. What's the impact of stress on sh... A shingles flareup later in life after having chickenpox?

Dr. Welch (03:33):

Well- well let's start with that first, actually. Your risk of getting shingles increases as you get older.

Clay (03:40):

Okay.

Dr. Welch (03:40):

Just steadily. The older you are, the more likely it is you will get shingles.

Clay (03:44):

Okay.

Dr. Welch (03:44):

In fact, about 1,000,000 people a year in the United States get shingles. Most of those are above 40.

Clay (03:52):

Okay.

Dr. Welch (03:53):

Um, so age is the first thing. The second thing is a weakened immune system, either due to some medical condition, like cancer or- or other immune suppressing conditions, or medicines that suppress your immune system. That's the second most likely cause of- of triggering a shingles outbreak. But then, you know, there's other things. Stress, um, lack of sleep, uh, uh, some dietary factors, everything. We find that- that people who are more stressed out are more likely to get shingles as well. But certainly the most common reasons are age and immunosuppression.

Diane (04:32):

Well that's just lovely (laughs).

Clay (04:33):

(Laughs).

Diane (04:35):

Isn't it? For those of us in the room, I being the eldest here, but none the less. So is it fairly common, Dr. Welch, shingles fairly common?

Dr. Welch (04:43):

O- one in three people in their lifetime will get shingles.

Diane (04:47):

Okay.

Dr. Welch (04:48):

Yes.

Diane (04:49):

So it's- so, what are, what, when we talk about shingles, how do we know the- the symptoms. Symptoms, and then after that, complications thereof.

Dr. Welch (04:57):

Sure. Now, shingles starts just like any cold. You might get a headache, you might get an upset stomach, some sore muscles. And then what you'll notice is, on a particular part of your body, now it's usually on the trunk, more rarely on the face, but only on one side of your body, it will start to tingle. And anyone who's had a cold sore knows that tingly feeling, that- that, "Oh, I'm gonna get a cold sore."

Diane (05:25):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Welch (05:25):

That's the same type of virus that causes shingles. You'll get a tingly feeling, and then two or three days later you will get a blistering rash, usually on... On one half of your body, on the trunk or on your face, and that will blister just exactly like chickenpox does. You'll get blisters, those blisters will open up, they will have some liquid in them, and then in about five to seven to 10 days they will crust over and they will go away.

Diane (05:56):

Initially, in the early days, can some folk maybe mistake it for, like, poison ivy if they've been working in their yard? Is there... It kind of mimics that, does it? Or does it not?

Dr. Welch (06:06):

A- absolutely.

Diane (06:07):

Oh, okay.

Dr. Welch (06:08):

So- so just as your mentioned, poison ivy is a blistering rash-

Diane (06:11):

Right. Right.

Dr. Welch (06:11):

... Which you typically don't get all over. You just brush up against it. So the most common reason someone mistakes chicken... I'm sorry, shingles for something else, is-

Diane (06:22):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Welch (06:23):

... Something they got into.

Diane (06:24):

Right.

Clay (06:24):

Oh. I can just hear people putting their McMuffins down as you went through that last description.

Diane (06:29):

(Laughs).

Clay (06:29):

Uh, (laughs).

Diane (06:31):

Indeed.

Clay (06:32):

Yeah. What, uh, uh, tell me about post-herpetic neuralgia.

Dr. Welch (06:36):

And, let's- let's-

Clay (06:37):

Did I get that right, by the way?

Dr. Welch (06:39):

Yes. You did.

Clay (06:41):

Okay. Thank you.

Dr. Welch (06:41):

Post-herp-

Diane (06:41):

Good job, Clay.

Dr. Welch (06:41):

... Her... Da... Herpetic neuralgia. And, uh, uh, this one is interesting as well. Let me tell you some of the other complications.

Clay (06:47):

Okay.

Dr. Welch (06:47):

Very, very rarely, from shingles, people can get pneumonia-

Clay (06:52):

Wow.

Dr. Welch (06:53):

... People can get encephalitis-

Diane (06:54):

Really?

Dr. Welch (06:54):

... And people can even die. But it's very, very rare.

Clay (06:58):

Okay.

Dr. Welch (06:58):

And typically, those people who die are elderly with immune conditions. Another complication of shingles is, if you get shingles on your face and it goes in your eye, one of the nerves that effect your eye, you can actually become blind on one side from shingles.

Diane (07:16):

Wow.

Dr. Welch (07:16):

Now again, all of these are very, very rare, and certainly with appropriate medical intervention, it can diminish the- the possibility that you'll get any of these things. But, the one thing, the main complication of having shingles, is called post-herpetic neuralgia, and one in 10 people up to two in 10 people get post-herpetic neuralgia. And what it is is shingles comes out and causes a painful, blistering rash, then the rash crusts over and goes away but the pain does not. It... The- the nerves continue to be of... Inflamed for a certain period of time. It can be months or even years, and it can be quite debilitating for people. And again, this increases as people get older. Um, and- and it can be an incredibly debilitating condition.

Diane (08:10):

And that is different from phantom pain? You hear so much about a phantom pain. Sometime. Would that be... But they actually, this is part of the- the, a nerve damage? Is that because of... shingles? Is that right?

Dr. Welch (08:24):

So- so it is phantom pain.

Diane (08:25):

It is? Okay.

Dr. Welch (08:26):

Just- just-

Diane (08:27):

Okay.

Dr. Welch (08:27):

... Like you are saying.

Diane (08:28):

Yeah.

Dr. Welch (08:28):

When- when they look at the nerves, the nerves are perfectly healthy. Um, it is continued signals from those nerves to your brain that you are in severe pain even though shingles has gone away, sometimes long ago.

Diane (08:43):

How long can you have shingles? I mean, how long does it s... How long do you have to deal with it?

Dr. Welch (08:48):

So, the shingles-

Diane (08:48):

Uh-huh.

Dr. Welch (08:49):

Only lasts between seven and 10 days.

Diane (08:51):

Oh, okay.

Dr. Welch (08:53):

But post-herpetic neuralgia can last years-

Diane (08:56):

Really?

Dr. Welch (08:58):

Uh, months to years. Yes.

Clay (08:58):

Wow. You've talked about the rarity of shingles. How easily can it be spread?

Dr. Welch (09:05):

Not very easy.

Clay (09:06):

Okay.

Dr. Welch (09:06):

But- but let me tell you why that is. Um, you cannot give someone else shingles. Remember, shingles comes from a virus that's already in your body. However, if you have not had chickenpox and you've never had a chickenpox vaccine, someone with shingles could give you chickenpox.

Clay (09:26):

Uh-oh.

Dr. Welch (09:27):

Then you would be set up to get shingles later on in your life, uh, uh, from getting that chickenpox.

Diane (09:33):

Look forward to that, Clay.

Dr. Welch (09:33):

But again, you can't-

Diane (09:33):

(Laughs).

Clay (09:34):

[inaudible 00:09:34].

Dr. Welch (09:36):

Yeah. (Laughs). It's-

Clay (09:36):

Thanks- thanks- thanks Doc, I appreciate that.

Dr. Welch (09:37):

Yeah (laughs).

Clay (09:38):

So glad I volunteered that information.

Dr. Welch (09:40):

Yeah (laughs).

Clay (09:40):
Uh, (laughs)...

Dr. Welch (09:42):
Now there... I Do have a solution for you though.

Clay (09:44):
Okay.

Dr. Welch (09:46):
Yeah, get that shingles vaccine.

Clay (09:48):
Oh, don't you worry about that (laughs).

Diane (09:49):
(Laughs). Yeah. You know, Dr. Welch, I've had friends who have had shingles, and they said that it's the worst pain they've ever had to endure. And these are, you know, these are people... One was a female co-worker, and that included childbirth when she was talking about the worst pain-

Clay (10:07):
Wow.

Diane (10:07):
... With shingles. And then another male coworker, he said, "Diane, I would go out and I would take off my shir..." It was in the summertime. "Take off my shirt and just try to cool down m... Cool my body down. The... Either... Even the wind," he said, irritated his skin. He said, "I wouldn't wish this on anybody." He said, "It was really bad."

Dr. Welch (10:28):
Yeah. I- it- it is really, really unfortunate. Very painful a- and fortunately now mostly preventable.

Clay (10:35):
Well, you referenced the vaccine. When was it first created?

Dr. Welch (10:41):
Okay. So we're gonna actually briefly talk about... uh, uh, and older vaccine which is no longer used-

Clay (10:46):
Okay.

Dr. Welch (10:47):
... In the United States called Zostavax. And that was a live virus vaccine that started in 2005 but was discontinued in 2020.

Clay (10:58):

Okay.

Dr. Welch (10:58):

And that was a- a single shot that you got for people over the age of 50 or people 19 and above with immune conditions, um, uh, who were at risk of shingles. Now, there is a newer vaccine called Shingrix which is a t- two dose vaccine, but the technicality with the old vaccine is, it was a live virus... vaccine. So you wouldn't wanna give it people with immune system problems. And as I've already described, people with immune system problems are at high likelihood of getting shingles. So the vaccine didn't really work in the very group of people you really needed it to. So with the newer vaccine, Shingrix, it is called a... recombinant a- adjuvant vaccine. And all that means is, they took some of the proteins on the outside of the virus that your body can recognize and added a little other protein that your body really doesn't like and just injected those two things in you. Now, this vaccine, Shingrix, you get your two doses, and you get them two to six months apart, and it is a very, very effective vaccine at preventing shingles.

Diane (12:15):

I have to tell you, Dr. Welch, I've had both. I had both of the vaccines. I got the first one when my coworkers... I mean, I was terrified.

Clay (12:24):

Mm-hmm.

Diane (12:24):

When... Then, a- and then of course my brain starts working. Every time I had to scra... I had an itch and I'm scratchin', "My gosh, oh my gosh. It's shingles." And it wasn't-

Clay (12:31):

Mm-hmm.

Diane (12:31):

... But that got my rear in to the doctor to get the first vaccine. And then some years later with the Shingrix... of course, that was, like you said, the two- the two dose. And it was... I wanna say that came out, maybe early 2017, '18, somewhere in that neighborhood. And in the beginning, it was hard to find.

Clay (12:52):

Huh.

Diane (12:52):

So I remember, I called my doctor and they said, "You have to get a," you know, "Go to," you know, "To your," uh, "To a pharmacy-

Clay (12:58):

Uh-huh.

Diane (12:58):

"... To, you know, Walgreens, CVS, or wherever." So, God love 'em, I think the people at Walgreens thought I was stalking them.

Clay (13:05):

(Laughs).

Diane (13:05):

Literally, I would go in there (laughs) to- to the pharmacist and I got my first dose.

Clay (13:10):

So they gave it to you there?

Diane (13:11):

Yes. They gave it to me there. I got my first dose there, but again, it has to be... The second dose has to be given within a certain amount of time. And I was just terrified that I wasn't going to be able to get my second dose in the allotted time. So I'd go in every week. And finally, they said, "Miss Deaton, we had a shot for you." And they were so happy to get rid of me-

Clay (13:33):

Yeah.

Dr. Welch (13:33):

(Laughs).

Diane (13:33):

... And I was so happy to get it, and I was done with it, but I have to tell you, Dr. Welch, it was that second shingles vaccine, or, the shot... I got so sick with that one. And that was kinda my benchmark-

Clay (13:47):

Mm-hmm.

Diane (13:47):

... As far as COVID vaccine, to see how sick I would be for it, because I've never had a reaction of any kind... with any vaccine until I got that second one.

Clay (13:56):

Di- did you have-

Diane (13:56):

But-

Clay (13:56):

... A reaction to the COVID vaccine?

Diane (13:58):

I have... Yes. The second- the second vaccine-

Clay (14:00):

Okay.

Diane (14:00):

... I did. But I wasn't as sick with the COVID as I was with the shingles. But, I knew what it was.

Clay (14:05):

Yeah.

Diane (14:06):

I knew what it was. And I was... It was okay. I was glad to have it.

Clay (14:09):

Yeah.

Diane (14:09):

But my question after that I... (laughs) after all of that-

Clay (14:12):

Sure.

Diane (14:12):

... Ya... To digress a moment, how important is it to get the, you know, the Shingrix vaccine, in that allotted amount- in that allotted amount of time, within the six months. What happens if you wait or forget about it and it's over six months from the first one? Do you have to start the process all over again?

Dr. Welch (14:32):

So, I- I'm actually gonna answer two questions there.

Diane (14:35):

Okay.

Dr. Welch (14:35):

And the first is, for those people who got Zostavax, just like you did-

Diane (14:39):

Okay. Right. Yes.

Dr. Welch (14:40):

... And the recommendation is, yes, go get a Shingrix series of shots. And the reason for that is, you know, Zostavax was a very good vaccine. It prevented shingles in about 70% of people. But, Shingrix in healthy adults can be 95-99% effective. So the- the answer in the first question is, yes, even if you've had Zostavax we do want you to go vac- vaccinated with Shingrix.

Dr. Welch (15:10):

And then, uh, the- the second part of that. If you've had your first dose-

Diane (15:16):

Yes.

Dr. Welch (15:17):

... We recommend that you get your second dose between two and six months after your first dose. However, if you miss that six-month interval, you don't have to go back and start over, though.

Diane (15:30):

So you don't.

Dr. Welch (15:30):

We want you-

Diane (15:31):

Okay. Okay.

Dr. Welch (15:31):

Yeah.

Clay (15:32):

Yeah.

Dr. Welch (15:32):

To go between two and six months, but you don't have to repeat. So, i- if you miss that six-month window, make an appointment, Shingrix is now widely available-

Diane (15:42):

Right.

Dr. Welch (15:42):

... Go get that second dose.

Diane (15:44):

Right.

Dr. Welch (15:44):

And the- the interesting thing about your side effects on that one is, some people react to the first dose and not the second one, some people react to both, and then some people react to the second one. But just remember, those two to three days that you don't feel well with maybe an upset stomach and a headache, and maybe some chills, two to three days of discomfort is so much better than months or even years-

Diane (16:09):

Oh.

Dr. Welch (16:09):

... Of post-herpetic neuralgia.

Diane (16:10):

Oh- oh amen. I agree with that. And you know, the thing is, I was only really sick the next day, the next mor... My... Like, half a day. But I knew what it was-

Clay (16:19):

Right.

Diane (16:19):

... And after I was... You know, I went to work, and I... 'Cause I wasn't expecting anything. And then it... I felt like I'd been hit by a truck. I mean, it was really (laughs) that significant.

Clay (16:29):

Wow.

Diane (16:29):

But again, I knew what it was. And then when it was done, it was done. It was over.

Clay (16:33):

Mm.

Diane (16:33):

You know? And I was so glad-

Dr. Welch (16:36):

Well, you-

Clay (16:36):

(Laughs).

Diane (16:37):

... 'Cause I didn't wanna have to do the [inaudible 00:16:37]-

Dr. Welch (16:37):

And y- you- you certainly know that your body had a healthy-

Diane (16:39):

Oh-

Dr. Welch (16:39):

... Immune reaction to the shot-

Diane (16:40):

... My body. Yeah (laughs).

Dr. Welch (16:40):

... Which is-

Diane (16:40):

Yes.

Dr. Welch (16:40):

... What we want.

Diane (16:43):

Yeah. Yes.

Clay (16:44):

So apropos of what, uh, Diane was just talking about, for- for people who haven't had it, A, I think what I understand now is it's easier to get-

Diane (16:53):

Yes.

Clay (16:53):

... Than it was back then when shingles-

Diane (16:55):

It just first came out. Yeah.

Clay (16:57):

When it first came out-

Diane (16:57):

Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Clay (16:57):

... And you took both shots at the pharmacy.

Diane (17:01):

I did. Yeah. Yes.

Clay (17:01):

You didn't have to go see your primary care physician.

Diane (17:03):

Now, that's how it was then. I'm assuming it's still the same.

Clay (17:06):

Is it the same way now, Doc?

Dr. Welch (17:07):

Absolutely, yes. Any pharmacist in the state of Louisiana who had a certain certificate can give you a Shingrix vaccine.

Clay (17:15):

So what's the process? You just call your local pharmacist and ask them, uh, about getting the vaccine and then make an appointment to go in and get it?

Diane (17:22):

Or just stalk them. You couple do that-

Clay (17:23):

(Laughs).

Diane (17:23):

(Laughs) it's easy!

Dr. Welch (17:26):

(Laughs). Yeah. So, uh, especially with them giving COVID vaccines, I always recommend calling before. Um, your primary care doctor might have it, a pharmacy may have it, a public health hav... Unit will have it.

Clay (17:37):

Mm.

Dr. Welch (17:37):

So, Shingrix is widely available now.

Clay (17:41):

It's, uh, it's interesting an- and like you said, it's- it's not as common as some of these other things that we've heard about, but you don't, that's the thing, you don't hear very much about shingles now as, I guess with everything else going on. Um, eh, talk a little bit about that and why it's so important that we keep it on peoples' radar.

Dr. Welch (18:00):

Yeah. The- the nice thing is that now that children are vaccinated against... chickenpox-

Clay (18:06):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Welch (18:07):

... There is an incredibly decreased risk of them getting shingles from the vaccine virus... which is where they would get it from, although it does happen. However, if they do get shingles after they've been vaccinated and [inaudible 00:18:21], it tends to be a very mild case of- of shingles. Um, so, uh, though the... statistic that we forget about is that one in three people will get shingles in their lifetime. And of course, these are people our age who never vaccinated against chickenpox. And we get into those older age groups where people probably have other health conditions. So if you give someone who's starting to be fir... Infirm, or with other medical conditions, if you give them shingles, that's just one more medical problem that can lead to worsening of other medical problems. And certainly, having post-herpetic neuralgia-

Diane (19:05):

Mm.

Dr. Welch (19:05):

... We hear stories all the time of people who were working until they got this and then were no longer able to work. There're people who have hobbies and, um, other interests, playing tennis, uh, I- I read a story about a woman who was a harpist, uh, who are no longer able to do these activities after getting post-herpetic neuralgia. And that's when you're supposed to be enjoying your life.

Diane (19:28):

Exactly.

Dr. Welch (19:29):

So, we really do wanna keep these on... peoples' radar, because really, this vaccine is more than 90-95% effective.

Clay (19:38):

Yeah.

Dr. Welch (19:38):

That's... you know, uh, uh, one person in 20 might still get it, but the other 19 will not who would have gotten it previously.

Diane (19:48):

Can you still get, though, a mild case of shingles even after getting the vaccine? I mean, it's not... I mean, i- it still happens. Is that correct, Dr. Welch? Or no.

Dr. Welch (19:59):

You- you are correct, but typically-

Diane (20:00):

Yeah.

Dr. Welch (20:00):

... If you have received the vaccine and you get shingles it's a much milder case.

Diane (20:04):

Right. Right. Is there anyone who should not get the vaccine?

Clay (20:08):

Mm.

Dr. Welch (20:09):

Absolutely yes. So let me walk you through that.

Diane (20:11):

okay.

Dr. Welch (20:12):

So, anyone who had an allergic reaction to their first dose-

Diane (20:15):

Mm.

Dr. Welch (20:15):

Of Shingrix should not get a- another dose. Pregnant women should not get, uh, a dose of Shingrix. And then anyone with sever immunosuppression should consult with their doctor before getting Shingrix. Now, many of these people will be recommended, but you wanna be under care of a special physician rather than just your pharmacist-

Diane (20:36):

Right.

Dr. Welch (20:36):

... If you have serious immunocompromising conditions.

Clay (20:39):

You mentioned earlier, and I wanted to- to- to just clarify. When you talked about some of the things that people were not able to do after having had shingles, do you mean they were done? Like, the- the harpist could not do that again, or the person playing tennis? Is this a temporary condition after having had it or is it something that you were saying they- they were no longer able to do?

Dr. Welch (21:03):

So, it's because of post-herpetic neuralgia.

Clay (21:06):

Okay.

Dr. Welch (21:06):

The- the pain and inflammation... Just like what was described before. It's like it's on fire.

Clay (21:12):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Welch (21:13):

It's a burning pain that's with you all the time. And so people who previously enjoyed other activities are now consumed with this pain. Sometimes just consumed with treating the pain, with, um, uh, you know, trying to do things to minimize it, and no longer, uh, ay, able to enjoy things in their life that they did before because of this post-herpetic neuralgia.

Diane (21:39):

Have we talked about the treatment? Have we-

Clay (21:41):

Yeah.

Diane (21:41):

... Have we said anything at all-

Clay (21:42):

Um-

Diane (21:42):

... About once you do-

Clay (21:43):

Uh-huh.

Diane (21:43):

... Have shingles? You know, I- I know that there are different times when I've gotten a little this or that, I just put calamine lo... Calamine lotion's kinda like a duct tape-

Clay (21:51):

Oh, yeah.

Diane (21:51):

... In- in life. You know?

Clay (21:51):

Yeah.

Diane (21:52):

It takes care of everything. Are there... What are the treatments for shingles, doctor?

Dr. Welch (21:58):

So, there are several treatments for shingles. The most common anti-viral medicines, ice... acyclovir, other ones like that. Obviously these medicines need to be taken as s... The sooner... the better.

Diane (22:12):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Welch (22:12):

So, if you suspect shingles or it- it's coming on, please contact your doctor immediately. There are anti-viral medicines that are helpful. Um, now, they also say taking a- a bathe, either with oat, crushed up oats and-

Diane (22:28):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Welch (22:28):

... Soothing water, there's also calamine lotion that can be taken. The most important thing you can do, though, if you have a shingles rash is make sure that rash is covered.

Clay (22:38):

Okay.

Diane (22:38):

Oh, it's-

Dr. Welch (22:38):

Because you certainly don't wanna spread it-

Diane (22:39):

... Covered. Okay.

Dr. Welch (22:39):

... To-

Diane (22:40):

Yeah.

Dr. Welch (22:40):

... A pregnant women-

Clay (22:41):

Mm. Mm-hmm.

Dr. Welch (22:41):

... To a child, to someone who hasn't had chickenpox.

Clay (22:44):

Wow. So can you... If you've had the vaccine and you've had shingles and chickenpox already, could you get it again?

Dr. Welch (22:51):

Most people, the vast majority of people who get shingles only get it once.

Diane (22:55):

Mm.

Dr. Welch (22:56):

But it is possible to get it again. So we recommend even people who have had shingles get that vaccine just to prevent them from getting it a second time. But then also, remember, say you had shingles when you were 50 and you recovered, if you get shingles again when you're 75, it's much more likely to be more serious and cause post-herpetic neuralgia. So even if you've had shingles, we do recommend you get the shingles shot.

Diane (23:20):

Okay. So that leads me to my question. Do I need to get a booster? Are there boosters out there? What... You know, because I did get both, you know, the first one, then the Shingrix, and... it wasn't- it wasn't that long ago, but do I need to get a booster? Will I need to get a booster, Doc? I'm very, I'm in pretty good health.

Dr. Welch (23:38):

Yeah.

Diane (23:38):

I don't, uh, you know. I'm... pretty good health. So I just- I just didn't know what the thinking is, uh, about a- a booster.

Dr. Welch (23:45):

Not yet.

Diane (23:46):

Okay.

Dr. Welch (23:47):

But-

Diane (23:47):

(Laughs).

Dr. Welch (23:47):

... Let me walk you-

Diane (23:47):

Yeah. Okay.

Dr. Welch (23:47):

... Through that.

Diane (23:48):

Okay.

Dr. Welch (23:48):

So (laughs), the- the only medical data we have is based on the fact that we've been using it since 2018.

Diane (23:57):

Okay. Not that long. Yeah.

Dr. Welch (23:57):

But what we know so far is it's very, very effective for four years.

Diane (24:03):

Okay. (Laughs).

Dr. Welch (24:03):

At least.

Clay (24:07):

Okay.

Dr. Welch (24:08):

So they're-

Diane (24:08):

So I'm [inaudible 00:24:08]

Dr. Welch (24:08):

... doing studies as we-

Diane (24:08):

... The four-year mark.

Dr. Welch (24:08):

... We-

Diane (24:08):

Okay. Thank you.

Dr. Welch (24:08):

(Laughs).

Diane (24:08):

(Laughs).

Clay (24:09):

See? I'm not the only one getting terrified-

Diane (24:11):

Yeah, okay. (Laughs).

Clay (24:11):

... In this podcast today. So here's a question. Let's say you got, you had chickenpox, then you were vaccinated, but you haven't had shingles. What's the likelihood that you're going to get shingles i... Now that you are vaccinated?

Dr. Welch (24:26):

So d... Uh, y... I assume you mean you got vaccinated...

Clay (24:29):

So you haven't, you- you've had-

Dr. Welch (24:30):

With- with shingles vaccine.

Clay (24:30):

... Chickenpox before-

Dr. Welch (24:30):

Oh.

Clay (24:31):

... You got the shingles vaccine, and you haven't yet had shingles. Um, what's the likelihood that you- that you'll get it?

Dr. Welch (24:37):

Very unlikely.

Clay (24:38):

Okay.

Dr. Welch (24:39):

Uh, depending on your health status-

Clay (24:41):

(Laughs).

Dr. Welch (24:41):

... This vaccine is upwards of 95-98% effective-

Clay (24:46):

Okay.

Dr. Welch (24:46):

... In healthy people.

Diane (24:47):

Yeah.

Dr. Welch (24:47):

Meaning, in the vaccine... I... Sorry. In people who would have gotten shingles, it protects 98 out of 100 people-

Clay (24:55):

Wow.

Dr. Welch (24:55):

... From getting shingles. Now, that- that reduces a little bit for people who have immunocompromising conditions. As you get older the vaccine effectiveness goes down to about 90%, but it's still gonna protect 90 out of 100 people, and those people who do get shingles, it's gonna be a weaker case.

Clay (25:13):

And, uh, just for our listening audience who can't see us, Diane was pumping her fists-

Diane (25:17):

(Laughs).

Clay (25:18):

... Like she just won the Stanley Cup.

Diane (25:18):

Yeah. I love it.

Clay (25:18):

So (laughs)-

Diane (25:21):

So, okay. Let's go back to my four years on (laughs).... I'm four years in, okay. So what will happen next? Dr. Welch? We just kinda wait to see if there's something el... But right now I'm good. Say I'm good. Say I'm good.

Dr. Welch (25:33):

Ab- absolutely yes.

Clay (25:33):

(Laughs).

Diane (25:34):

Say I'm good. Okay. Okay.

Dr. Welch (25:35):

They're- they're doing studies on people and- and watching people who have had the shingles vaccine-

Diane (25:41):

Yeah.

Dr. Welch (25:41):

And seeing how many of those people are getting shingles. Now we're seeing that it gives very good four-year protection, but the only way we'll know if protection wanes is if time passes.

Diane (25:52):

So if I get shingles I call you (laughs) and let you know-

Clay (25:54):

(Laughs).

Diane (25:55):

... What happened after four years? I hope I never have to make that phone call, Dr. Welch, I'm just gonna say.

Dr. Welch (25:59):

(Laughs).

Diane (25:59):

Okay. (Laughs).

Clay (26:00):

You know, I think informationally though, the way you've described-

Diane (26:04):

Mm.

Clay (26:04):

... The impact it has on a person, th- the viability of- of, or the effectiveness of the vaccine if you get it, it- it does make it... I mean, you can understand it, it makes it really easy to- to know. If you get vaccine, uh, get the vaccine, you are very unlikely to get shingles if you've not had it. I mean, it's very simple to understand. Is there something else about this that we've talked about that- that you haven't been able to say that we want the audience to hear?

Dr. Welch (26:31):

Just- just really simply, I think... that... Um, the one question I get about shingles is, if a child is vaccinated against chickenpox, how likely is it that they will get shingles or chickenpox later in their life?

Clay (26:51):

Okay.

Dr. Welch (26:51):

And, again, chickenpox vaccine is very, very effective, but it is possible to get... chickenpox after being vaccinated, and it is possible to get shingles after that.

Clay (27:03):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Welch (27:04):

So it... Even though the vast majority of children vaccinated against chickenpox... will never get shingles... we do recommend that they get a shingles vaccine if they are at risk just to make sure.

Clay (27:19):

Wow. Fantastic.

Diane (27:21):

A- and again, Dr. Welch, you were saying that prior to, what, 1980? That about, what, 98, 99% of folks in America had the chickenpox. Is that right?

Dr. Welch (27:34):

You are correct.

Diane (27:34):

Yeah. So it- it was pretty... You know, we- we kinda grew... It was a childhood disease.

Clay (27:39):

Mm-hmm.

Diane (27:39):

And it was pretty common. And I know, I don't remember, but my mom, an... You know, my mom did, I had it when I was a baby.

Clay (27:45):

Mm-hmm.

Diane (27:45):

And, i... You know, you just, you had it, you dealt with it, I'm sorry that you never did-

Clay (27:49):

Oh, no. That's okay.

Diane (27:49):

... Clay, but it's (laughs)-

Clay (27:50):

It's, uh, no, I'm gonna get vac-

Diane (27:54):

Yeah.

Clay (27:54):

Uh, Shingrix is in my future.

Diane (27:54):

It... Yes.

Clay (27:54):

Don't worry about it.

Diane (27:54):

Maybe this weekend, as a matter of fact. Yeah.

Clay (27:55):

Oh, maybe this afternoon-

Diane (27:56):

(Laughs).

Clay (27:56):

... If I can help it.

Dr. Welch (27:56):

(Laughs).

Diane (27:58):

But in any event, it's just good information to know, uh, what was in our past-

Clay (28:03):

Mm-hmm.

Diane (28:03):

... And now what's in our future-

Clay (28:04):

Oh, yeah.

Diane (28:05):

... And how we can help each other. And this isn't anything that runs in families, Dr. Welch-

Clay (28:09):

Right.

Diane (28:09):

... This is just a... Something that just happens.

Clay (28:11):

But you know the m... The amazing-

Dr. Welch (28:12):

You are correct.

Clay (28:13):

... The amazing thing about dialoguing about this, and I'm sure for the countless numbers of people who are listening-

Diane (28:17):

Yes.

Clay (28:18):

... I cannot be the only person in that circumstance-

Diane (28:21):

Absolutely.

Clay (28:21):

... So a lot of people are listening to this going, "Wow."

Diane (28:22):

Yeah.

Clay (28:23):

And it's a simple thing.

Diane (28:24):

Mm-hmm.

Clay (28:24):

Just go get vaccinated. That's why this conversation, these conversations, are so protein-rich-

Diane (28:29):

Yes.

Clay (28:29):

... Because there's information that'll help you avoid the pain down the road. Right? And, uh, I think, Doc, dialoguing about these things has just an asymmetrical upside, a big value to the public.

Dr. Welch (28:42):

You know, uh, what's interesting about that is, my- my parents cannot recall me ever having chickenpox, even though, a- as you all have both mentioned, when we were all children they used to have chickenpox parties-

Clay (28:54):

Mm.

Diane (28:54):

Oh.

Dr. Welch (28:54):

... Because you really did want children to get chickenpox-

Diane (28:56):

Right. Yeah.

Dr. Welch (28:57):

... As young as possible-

Clay (28:58):

Right.

Diane (28:58):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Welch (28:59):

... 'Cause as you get older, chickenpox get worse and worse. But no one remembers me ever getting chickenpox, so believe it or not, I don't wanna brag here, but when I got my Shingrix series, I even forgot I got it.

Clay (29:12):

Wow.

Dr. Welch (29:12):

I got the shot on a Friday and on Monday someone asked me how it was and I had absolutely no trou-

Clay (29:20):

How 'bout that, Diane.

Diane (29:20):

Uh, no, w-

Dr. Welch (29:21):

So-

Diane (29:21):

No, way. Wait.

Clay (29:21):

(Laughs).

Diane (29:21):

Wait.

Dr. Welch (29:22):

(Laughs).

Diane (29:22):

For both of them? You had no reaction at all?

Dr. Welch (29:23):

For both.

Diane (29:23):

Oh, that's not fair.

Clay (29:23):

(Laughs).

Diane (29:23):

(Laughs).

Dr. Welch (29:23):

(Laughs).

Diane (29:23):

Oh, that's not fair.

Dr. Welch (29:28):

And- and you- you do wonder, though-

Diane (29:29):

Yeah.

Dr. Welch (29:29):

... Did... Was I one of those people who did not have chickenpox?

Diane (29:33):

Oh.

Clay (29:36):

Ah.

Dr. Welch (29:36):

So... I-

Diane (29:36):

Now the light turns on.

Dr. Welch (29:36):

... I have no idea.

Clay (29:36):

See?

Diane (29:37):

Yes. Yeah.

Dr. Welch (29:37):

(Laughs).

Diane (29:37):

Now the light turns on.

Dr. Welch (29:38):

Yeah. I- I have no idea. But [inaudible 00:29:40]-

Clay (29:40):

And you've not had shingles either though, right?

Dr. Welch (29:42):

And I've had neither shingles nor chickenpox.

Diane (29:44):

Ooh, good deal.

Clay (29:44):

So we could be in the same boat here, Doc.

Dr. Welch (29:47):

Yes. So- so your vaccine journey may be pretty easy if- if mine is any-

Clay (29:51):

Yeah. [inaudible 00:29:51]-

Diane (29:51):

I'm gonna stick my tongue-

Dr. Welch (29:51):

... Any indication.

Diane (29:52):

... Out at you right now, Clay.

Clay (29:54):

(Laughs). Listen, my vaccine journey-

Diane (29:55):

(Laughs).

Clay (29:57):

... Will begin and end today. (Laughs). Don't worry about it. (Laughs).

Diane (29:59):

Good deal. So we spoke to Clay, we're speaking to countless other listeners-

Clay (30:02):

That's exa- that exactly right.

Diane (30:03):

... So, it's a- it's a good deal. It's-

Clay (30:03):

(Laughs).

Diane (30:04):

... All a good deal. Dr. Welch, anything else as we close our... Come to the last of our podcast today, anything else you'd like to- to mention?

Dr. Welch (30:10):

Uh, I- I would, actually. I would just like to share a personal story. Um, my mother got shingles when she was about 76 years old. And, uh, she was relatively healthy, still walked every day, occasionally played golf. Um-

Diane (30:31):

Wow.

Dr. Welch (30:31):

... But after that experience, she was the victim of post-herpetic neuralgia which kept her in pain every single day the rest of her life.

Diane (30:41):

Oh my goodness.

Dr. Welch (30:42):
So, un- unfortunately-

Diane (30:43):
I'm so sorry.

Dr. Welch (30:43):
... My mother... Uh, this was- this was sort of before the current shingles vaccine, and, uh, was not able to vaccinated, and I just wanna stress to people before it happens how debilitating and life-altering, and kinda quality of life damaging... post-heretic... Herpetic neuralgia can be. And so by getting a single two dose series of a vaccine which, yes, may give you a headache and a little... not great feeling for 24 hours after both shot, you can prevent years of pain. So I really wanna stress how important this is.

Diane (31:23):
And you know, that's-

Clay (31:24):
Wow.

Diane (31:24):
... A wonderful example. Again, thank you for sharing from your personal life, Dr. Welch. But so many times people, they hear shingles and they shrug.

Clay (31:32):
Yeah.

Diane (31:32):
"Oh, it's no big deal."

Clay (31:33):
Right.

Diane (31:33):
"It's no big deal." Thank you-

Clay (31:34):
It's a very big deal.

Diane (31:34):
... Because it can be a- a big deal. Thank you.

Clay (31:37):

Well, we so appreciate, um, Dr. Welch, your contributions to helping the public understand, and then the motivation to go and be proactive so that you can avoid the impact of post-herpetic neuralgia, and what it can do, not only to you but I'm sure the family members around you. Thank you so much for joining us on this episode of Vax Matters.

Dr. Welch (31:57):

Thank you for having me.

Clay (31:58):

So thank you all for listening to the show today. We hope you'll join us next time for Vax Matters.