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The Importance of Shingles Prevention in CKD and Dialysis Patients

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Chronic kidney disease (CKD) is characterized by progressive immune dysfunction, with accumulation of uremic toxins, reduced T- and B-cell function, and impaired innate immunity, all of which place patients at substantially increased risk of vaccine-preventable infections. Epidemiologic evidence demonstrates that the risk of herpes zoster (HZ) and its complications, including post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN), rises in parallel with declining renal function and is particularly elevated in patients on dialysis and in kidney transplant recipients. Case reports further illustrate clinically meaningful consequences, such as acute kidney injury following antiviral therapy and abdominal wall pseudohernia, underscoring that HZ in this population is rarely a benign event. The adjuvanted recombinant zoster vaccine (RZV; Shingrix) has fundamentally changed the prevention landscape. Pooled ZOE-50/70 phase III data demonstrated vaccine efficacy of 95.6% in adults ≥ 50 years and 94.7% in those ≥ 70 years, with consistent benefit across Asian, including Korean, populations and in participants with underlying comorbidities. The ZOE-LTFU study confirmed durable protection and predicted immune persistence beyond a decade, and dedicated trials have shown favorable immunogenicity and safety in autologous hematopoietic stem cell and renal transplant recipients. The 2023 Korean Society of Infectious Diseases (KSID) guideline accordingly recommends RZV for immunocompromised adults, including CKD, dialysis, and transplant populations. Emerging data on the RSV vaccine (Arexvy) similarly indicate a 6.1-fold higher RSV-related hospitalization risk in CKD adults ≥ 50 years, supporting expanded vaccination strategies. This lecture summarizes the rationale, evidence, and practical implementation of HZ and RSV vaccination in nephrology practice, emphasizing the pivotal role of nephrologists—whose direct recommendation markedly improves uptake—and the importance of timely immunization before dialysis initiation or transplantation.

Keywords: Shingles, Shingrix, Vaccination, RSV