



Post-Herpetic Neuralgia

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Herpes zoster is a viral infection caused by the reactivation of the varicella-zoster virus (VZV). The primary varicella infection occurs when the patient contracts chicken pox. Following the resolution of chicken pox, the virus then remains dormant in dorsal sensory ganglia and cranial nerve ganglia for years to decades. Individuals are asymptomatic while the virus is dormant, and reactivation of VZV results in a characteristic vesicular dermatomal rash. Some patients with herpes zoster develop PHN, and this persisting neuropathic pain can last for years.

Herpes zoster afflicts millions of older adults worldwide each year and causes significant suffering and disability because of both the acute pain that occurs in association with the rash and the chronic pain that is present in those patients who develop PHN. VZV-induced neuronal destruction and inflammation causes pain that interferes with activities of daily living and reduces quality of life. Recent advances have improved our ability to both diminish the incidence of these conditions as well as manage the remaining cases more effectively. These advances include the development of a herpes zoster vaccine, consensus that antiviral therapy and aggressive pain management can reduce the burden of this disease, the identification of efficacious treatments for PHN, and the recognition of PHN as a study model for neuropathic pain research