

Shingles (Herpes Zoster)

Knowing the facts



Shingles is a painful localized skin rash often with blisters that is caused by the varicella zoster virus (VZV), the same virus that causes chickenpox. Anyone who has had chickenpox can develop shingles because VZV remains in the nerve cells of the body after the chickenpox infection clears and VZV can reappear years later causing a painful rash. It can even occur in children.



Did You Know?

In the United States, there are an estimated 1 million cases of shingles each year. Shingles most commonly occurs in people 50 years old or older, people who have medical conditions that keep the immune system from working properly, or people who receive immunosuppressive drugs.

How is Shingles spread?

Shingles is not contagious from person to person. Shingles is a reactivation of the VZV virus and this condition is not spread through sneezing, coughing or casual contact. Anyone who has recovered from chickenpox may develop shingles. Someone with Shingles can spread the virus that will cause chickenpox to others who have not had chickenpox disease or the chickenpox vaccine. This spread occurs when someone comes into contact with a person with Shingles in the blister phase.

What are the symptoms of Shingles?

Pain, itching or tingling of the skin which is followed by a painful skin rash of blister-like lesions, usually localized to a small area on one side of the body, and often the face or trunk. Other symptoms can include fever, headache, chills and upset stomach.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Shingles usually starts as a rash on one side of the face or body. The rash starts as blisters that scab after 3 to 5 days. The rash usually clears within 2 to 4 weeks.

When and for how long is a person able to spread Shingles?

The virus is **not** spread through sneezing, coughing or casual contact. A person with shingles can spread the disease when the rash is in the blister-phase. Once the rash has developed crusts, the person is no longer contagious. A person is not infectious before blisters appear or with post-herpetic neuralgia (pain after the rash is gone).

What is the treatment for Shingles?

There are several medications to treat Shingles. Consult with a healthcare professional about treatment options. Most commonly, a person has only one episode of shingles in his/her lifetime. Although rare, a second or even third case of shingles can occur.

How do I prevent the spread of Shingles?

- A person with Shingles may attend school or childcare if the blisters/lesions can be covered and the bandages can stay clean and dry.
- Two doses of varicella vaccine are recommended for most children who have not had history of chickenpox disease or vaccine.
- Thorough hand washing is one of the best way to prevent spread of infectious diseases. Help children to wash hands as well.
- The risk of spreading shingles is low if the rash is covered. People with shingles should keep the rash covered, not touch or scratch the rash, and wash their hands often to prevent the spread of VZV.
- Shingles vaccine was recently recommended by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) to reduce the risk of shingles and its associated pain in people 60 years old or older.