

Shingles

What is shingles?

Shingles (herpes zoster) is a painful skin rash caused by reactivation of the varicella zoster virus that causes chickenpox. The rash appears in irregular lines on the skin following nerve pathways. Anyone that has recovered from chickenpox may develop shingles, but it is more common in people over 50 years old. It is also more common in people with medical conditions that keep their immune system weak, such as certain cancers, HIV, and conditions requiring immunosuppressive drugs.

What are the symptoms?

- There may be pain, itching, or tingling in an area of the skin before the rash appears.
- Chills, fever, headache, and stomach upsets may occur 3-4 days before the rash appears
- A red rash that seems to follow a line-like pattern on the skin 1 or 2 days later the rash changes to fluid filled blisters—these dry in about 5 days.
- Severe pain in the area of the rash

Possible complications:

- Pain at the site of the rash may persist for months or years
- Scarring may occur
- People with immune problems may have repeated cases of shingles
- Pneumonia, hearing problems, and blindness

How is it spread?

- A person with shingles cannot give shingles to another person. However, the virus that causes shingles can be spread to someone that has not had chickenpox, causing them to get chickenpox. Spread occurs by direct contact with fluid from blisters of a person with shingles.

For more information visit cdc.gov or call:

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- If a person has lesions on more than one area of the body (disseminated herpes zoster) they are able to spread shingles by coughing, sneezing, or by contact with fluid from their blisters
- Once all of the blisters have scabbed, the person is no longer considered infectious

How is it treated?

- Antiviral drugs may be prescribed
- Pain relieving medication
- Over the counter anti-itching cream

How is it prevented?

- CDC recommends two doses of recombinant zoster vaccine (RZV, Shingrix) to prevent shingles and related complications in adults 50 years and older. Shingrix is also recommended for adults 19 years and older who have weakened immune systems because of disease or therapy.

Carefully avoid contact by:

- Washing sheets and clothing of the infected person in hot soapy water daily
- People with shingles should keep the rash covered and not scratch or touch the rash
- Washing hands often
- Until rash is scabbed avoid contact with pregnant women, premature babies, and people with weak immune systems.