

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET



Department of Health & Human Services

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Shingles (Zoster)

What is Shingles?

Shingles is a rash disease caused by a virus of the herpes family. It is the same virus that causes chickenpox. After a chickenpox infection, the virus does not leave the body but hides along the pathways of the nerves of the skin. The characteristic rash occurs on the skin over the nerves where the virus is hidden. At a later time the virus may reappear as shingles.

Who can get it?

Shingles can occur at any age in people who have had chickenpox but is most common after age 50. Persons with immunity problems may be more likely to get shingles.

What are the symptoms?

- Chills, fever, fatigue and upset stomach may occur 3 to 4 days before the rash.
- The rash occurs in chickenpox-like crops, most often on the chest and waist area and spreads in a line-like pattern.
- One (1) or two (2) days later the rash changes to fluid-filled blisters called "vesicles."
- About the fifth day the vesicles dry and scab.
- Often there is deep severe pain in the rash area due to the inflammation of the nerves.

How is it spread?

The fluid in the vesicles of the shingles rash contains the virus. Coming in contact with this fluid can cause chickenpox within 10 - 21 days. Covering the rash will decrease the chance of spreading the chickenpox virus.

How long is the person contagious?

Once all the vesicles have scabbed, the person is no longer able to spread chickenpox.

Are there complications?

- Pain at the site of the healed rash has been known to persist for months or years, usually in the elderly.
- People who have immunity problems, such as those with leukemia, cancer, or AIDS may have repeated cases of shingles.
- Occasional scarring can occur.

What is the treatment for Shingles?

- There are antiviral drugs that may be ordered for people with immunity problems.
- Pain relieving medications may be ordered.

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HAND WASHING INSTRUCTIONS:

- use soap and running water
- rub your hands vigorously for 20 seconds
- wash all surfaces, including:
 - backs of hands
 - wrists
 - between fingers
 - under fingernails
- rinse well
- dry hands with a paper towel
- turn off the water using a paper towel instead of bare hands

For more information on Shingles, call (248) 858-1406 or toll free 1 (800) 848-5533.

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