

Shingles (Varicella –Zoster Virus)

What is shingles (herpes zoster)?

Herpes zoster, commonly known as “shingles,” is a viral disease. It is the same virus that causes chickenpox. In order to develop shingles, one must have had chickenpox at some point in their lifetime. Years later the virus may reactivate as shingles.

Who is at risk for developing shingles?

It is more common in people over the age of 50, but anyone who has had chickenpox is at risk for developing shingles. It usually occurs in people who have a weakened immune system from chemotherapy, radiation treatment, HIV disease, transplant operations, or stress.

What are the symptoms of shingles?

- Burning, sharp shooting pain, tingling or itching of the skin.
- Occurs on one side of the body or face.
- After 7 to 12 days, a rash, which is usually red and looks like small fluid-filled blisters, develops. The rash or blisters can last for 1 to 2 weeks and eventually dry out and form scabs.
- Once the scabs fall off, scars may form on the skin.
- There may be prolonged pain in some cases.

Can shingles affect the eye?

Yes. If the shingles blisters are located on the face and develop close to or around the eye, you should contact your healthcare team as soon as possible. You may need to see an eye specialist to make sure the virus has not affected the nerves or covering of the eyeball.

How is shingles transmitted from one person to another?

- Contact with the leaking fluid-filled blisters.
- Contact with contaminated surfaces.
- In some cases, the virus can be spread through the air.

How long is a person with shingles contagious?

A person with shingles is contagious until all blisters have crusted over into a scab. If you have never had chickenpox and are exposed to someone who has a severe case of shingles, you may get chickenpox.

If you are not sure if you have ever had chickenpox, your healthcare team can perform a simple blood test to find out if you have had the virus and didn't know it.

How is shingles treated?

Your doctor may prescribe an antiviral medicine. It is most effective when started within 72 hours of the development of the blisters. The antiviral medicine can decrease the spread of the rash and pain. In certain circumstances, patients may need medicines for pain management as well.

If you get shingles once, can you get it again?

Yes. Although most people who get shingles only experience one attack of the virus, others can have multiple attacks over time. Those who have a stressed immune system are at greater risk for developing shingles more than once.

If you are in need of immediate assistance, please call 732-235-2465 and select the option that best meets your needs.