

SHINGLES

PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

What is Shingles?

Shingles is a painful skin rash caused by the varicella zoster virus. The varicella zoster virus is the same virus that causes chickenpox. After a person recovers from the chickenpox, the virus stays in the body. Usually the virus does not cause any problems; however the virus can reappear later, causing shingles.

How is it spread?

- Person to person by direct contact with fluid-filled blisters of an affected person.
- Indirect contact with articles soiled by discharge from blisters.
- Persons with shingles may be a source of infection for a week after the appearance of fluid-filled blisters. Once the rash has developed crusts, the person is no longer contagious.
- A person who never had chickenpox coming into contact with shingles blisters, may develop chickenpox.

How is it treated?

Several antiviral medications are available to treat shingles. These medications should be started as soon as possible after the rash appears to shorten the duration and severity of the illness. Varicella Immune Globulin may be recommended for immunocompromised contacts since it may prevent or modify the disease.

How can we prevent Shingles?

- Cover affected draining lesions with protective dressings.
- Good hand washing after contact with lesions or dressings.
- Disinfection of articles soiled with discharge from lesions.
- Zostavax, a shingles vaccine was licensed by the FDA for use in persons 60 years of age and older to prevent shingles.

SYMPTOMS OF SHINGLES

- Chills, fever, fatigue and gastrointestinal disturbance may be present 3-5 days before rash develops.
- Numbness, itching and severe pain on one side of your body followed by clusters of blister-like lesions.
- A rash occurs in chickenpox-like crops, most often on the chest and waist area and spreads in a linear pattern.
- The rash changes to fluid-filled blisters called vesicles 1-2 days later.
- Vesicles dry and scab about 5 days after onset.
- There is often severe deep pain in the rash area due to inflammation of the nerves.

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