



Shingles

(Herpes Zoster)

What is shingles?

Shingles is a painful rash due to the same virus that causes chickenpox. After a chickenpox infection, the virus does not leave the body but hides along the nerve paths of the skin. Shingles occurs when the dormant chickenpox virus becomes active again.

Who can get shingles?

Everyone who has had chickenpox can get shingles. This happens to about one in five people. Why the virus becomes active again in some people and not others is unknown. The risk of shingles increases with advancing age, but it can occur in children. People with weakened immune systems, such as the elderly and those with certain medical conditions, are more likely to get shingles.

What are the symptoms of shingles?

1. Chills, fever, fatigue and upset stomach may occur a day or two before other symptoms.
2. The first symptom is often a tingling feeling on the skin, itchiness or a stabbing pain followed several days later by a rash. The rash is in a line-like pattern that follows the nerve path and is on one side of the body.
3. One or two days later the rash changes to clusters or bands of fluid-filled blisters called "vesicles" that look like chickenpox. When the rash is at its peak, symptoms range from mild itching to extreme and intense pain.
4. About the fifth day, the vesicles dry and scab.
 - The rash and pain usually disappear within three to five weeks.

How is shingles spread?

The virus that causes shingles is in the fluid of the vesicles. Shingles cannot be passed on to others, so they get shingles. It can be passed through direct contact with the vesicle fluid or by direct contact with articles soiled by the fluid of the vesicles. When the virus is moved into the eyes, nose, or throat of someone who has never had chickenpox, that person can get chickenpox. It takes 10-21 days from the time of contact with the virus for chickenpox to appear. Once all the vesicles have scabbed, the person is no longer able to spread the virus.

What can be done to prevent the spread of shingles?

Chickenpox must be prevented in order to prevent shingles. Remember, you can't get shingles if you have never had chickenpox. There is a vaccine to prevent chickenpox. Immunized people are unlikely to develop shingles. However, if a person has already had chickenpox, the chickenpox vaccine will not stop them from getting shingles. Instead, there is now a separate vaccine to prevent developing shingles if you have already had a bout with chickenpox.

Covering the rash and careful handwashing after touching the area or soiled bandages will reduce the risk of spreading the virus.

Recommended Absence:

Students and staff with shingles may return to school and/or daycare as soon as they are feeling well enough to attend and the rash blisters are covered or are crusted and dry.

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