



SHINGLES (HERPES ZOSTER)

What is shingles?

Shingles is an infection caused by the same virus that causes chickenpox. You can't get shingles unless you have had chickenpox. After people recover from chickenpox, the virus goes back to the roots of nerve cells near the spinal cord and becomes inactive. Later, when the virus is reactivated, the rash is called shingles.

Why the virus becomes active again is not known. Anything that weakens the immune system such as immune-suppressing medications, cancer, AIDS, or another illness, may reactivate the virus. Advancing age, the stress of major surgery, and emotional stress can also trigger shingles.

Shingles is most common in adults over age 50 years, but it can occur in children and teenagers as well. Most people will have shingles only once in their lifetime.

What are the symptoms?

Shingles usually starts with burning, sharp pain, or tingling on one side of the body or face. The most common site is the back and upper abdomen. Some people feel tired and ill with fever, headache and upset stomach.

After a few to several days, a rash of small blisters appears in the skin. Within a couple of days after the blisters appear, they begin to dry and scab over. Over the next 2 weeks the scabs fall off.

The blisters are typically found in a thick line, often wrapping around from the back to the chest or abdomen, only on one side of the body – and only in one area of the body. Shingles also may appear on one side of the face, or one arm or leg.

Is shingle contagious?

A person with shingles can give chickenpox to a person who has never had chickenpox. Shingles is much less contagious than chickenpox because it is spread only through direct contact with the blister fluid, whereas chickenpox can be spread through the air.

If you have shingles, avoid close contact with infants, pregnant women, and anyone who has never had chickenpox until your blisters are completely dry.



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What is the treatment?

- You can get some relief from the discomfort by:
 - Applying cold water compresses to the rash
 - Taking acetaminophen or ibuprofen
- Your doctor may also prescribe:
 - Stronger painkillers for more severe discomfort
 - An antiviral pills, if started within 3 days after the first blisters

How long does shingles last?

The rash from shingles usually heals in 2 to 3 weeks and the pain or irritation will usually fade away in 3 to 5 weeks. However, pain or discomfort may last long after the rash has healed, especially in people over age 50 years.

CALL YOUR DOCTOR IF:

- You have a fever after the first couple days.
- The pain is severe.
- You have blisters on the tip of your nose or close to your eyes.