

## Shingles (Zoster)

---

### What is shingles?

Shingles is a localized infection caused by the same virus (varicella zoster) that causes chickenpox. It only occurs in people who have had chickenpox in the past.

### What are the symptoms?

The first symptom is usually a tingling or burning sensation on the skin, itching, or a stabbing pain. The most frequently mentioned symptom is pain. A rash with blisters develop, that scab after 3-5 days. The rash and pain usually occur on one side of the body, or clusters on one side of the face. The rash usually disappears within 2 to 4 weeks.

### Who gets shingles?

Anyone who has had chickenpox in the past can get shingles. The disease is primarily seen in persons with weakened immune systems, such as the elderly and those with certain underlying medical conditions.

Anyone with shingles on the upper half of their face should see a doctor at once. There is some risk the virus could cause damage to the eyes.

### How is shingles spread?

Shingles cannot be passed from person to person through sneezing, coughing, or casual contact. The virus is present at the site of the rash and is contagious for a week after the appearance of lesions (blisters) or until the blisters become dry and crusted.

If a person who has never had chickenpox (or been vaccinated against chickenpox) comes in direct contact with the rash, the person would develop chickenpox, not shingles.

A person must have had chickenpox in the past to develop shingles. However, contact with a person with shingles does not cause another person's dormant virus to reactivate.

### How is shingles disease diagnosed?

In addition to looking at how the rash appears on your body, your doctor may also take a scraping or swab of the blisters to send to a laboratory for analysis.

### Is there a treatment for shingles?

Yes, the most common treatments include:

- Antiviral medicines to reduce the pain and duration of shingles.
- Over the counter pain medicines to help reduce pain during an attack of shingles.
- Topical antibiotics applied directly to the skin to stop infection of the blisters.

There is no cure, but treatment may shorten the length of illness and prevent complications. However, most cases of shingles resolve on their own without specific treatment.

### Can you get shingles more than once?

Unfortunately, yes, but that rarely happens. Since shingles is caused by a reactivation of a dormant virus in the nerves of people who have previously had chickenpox, shingles can occur more than once.

### Is there a vaccine available?

Yes, the vaccine for shingles (Zostavax®) is licensed for use in people 60 years old and older to prevent shingles. A single dose of zoster vaccine is recommended whether or not they report a prior episode of herpes zoster. Persons with chronic medical conditions may be vaccinated unless a contraindication or precaution exists for their condition.

### What can be done to prevent shingles?

Chickenpox must be prevented in order to prevent shingles. If you have never had chickenpox, receiving the chickenpox (Varicella) vaccine may reduce the risk of developing shingles later in life.

People with shingles should keep the rash covered, not scratch the rash, and wash their hands. Once the rash has developed crusts, the person is no longer contagious.

### For further information visit:

<http://www.cdc.gov/shingles/about/index.html>