

Shingles

FACTSHEET

Herpes Zoster

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What is Shingles?

Shingles, also called Herpes Zoster, is a localized infection caused by the same virus that causes chickenpox. This virus remains in the nerve roots of all persons who have had chickenpox and can come out in your body again years later to cause illness.

Who gets Shingles?

Shingles is more common after the age of 50 and the risk increases with increasing age. Occasionally shingles does occur in younger individuals. It affects men and women and all races with equal frequency and occurs sporadically throughout the year.

What are the symptoms of Shingles?

The first symptom is often a tingling feeling on the skin, itching, or pain. After several days, a rash appears beginning as a band or patch of red dots on one side of the trunk or face. The rash then develops into small fluid-filled blisters that begin to dry out and crust over. When the rash is at its peak, symptoms can range from mild itching to extreme and intense pain.

How is Shingles spread?

A person must have already had chickenpox in the past to develop shingles. Contact with an infected person does not cause another person to develop shingles. However, a person who has never had chickenpox could develop chickenpox after exposure to the fluid filled blister from someone with shingles.

How soon do symptoms appear?

The chickenpox virus lives in the body's nerve roots forever. It can reactivate at any time after the initial disease of chickenpox.

What can I do if I get shingles?

Contact your health care provider as soon as possible to discuss treatment with antiviral medications. These medications are most effective if given as soon as possible after rash onset.

Is a person with Shingles contagious?

Yes. A person with shingles is contagious only to those who have never had chickenpox or been vaccinated for chickenpox. The virus that causes shingles can be transmitted for one week after the eruption of the fluid-filled blisters.

Can you get Shingles more than once?

Yes, since the chickenpox virus lives in the body forever, it is possible for it to reactivate more than once.

Can Shingles be prevented?

There is a shingles vaccine (Zostavax), which is only recommended for adults aged 60 years or older.

Is there a treatment for Shingles?

Several medications are available to treat shingles. These medications should be taken as soon as possible after the rash appears to reduce the length and severity of the illness.

Want more information?

Information about Shingles and other related health care topics can be found at the website www.cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please call 202-442-9371.



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