

Shingles (Herpes Zoster)

What is Shingles (Herpes Zoster)?

Shingles is a skin infection caused by the germ (virus) that causes chickenpox.

The virus remains in the nerve roots of all people who have had chickenpox and can come out of your body again many years after the chickenpox to cause shingles.

People who have shingles can pass the virus to those who have not had chickenpox.

What are the Symptoms of Shingles?

Shingles usually starts as a painful itchy or tingly rash that forms clusters of blister-like lesions (sores), which appear on one side of your body or face.

The lesions dry out and crust over in about 5 to 7 days. The rash usually goes away in 2 weeks, but the pain can last for months or years after the rash heals.

Other symptoms may include fever, chills and upset stomach.

What are the Side Effects of Shingles?

Shingles are usually not dangerous to healthy people.

How is Shingles Found?

Your health care provider will look at your symptoms.

Can Shingles be Prevented?

The only way to reduce the risk of developing shingles is to get vaccinated. The shingles vaccine is recommended for adults aged 50 and older. This vaccine is given in two shots 2 to 6 months apart.

How is Shingles Treated?

Your health care provider can prescribe medicine. These medicines are most effective if given as soon as possible after the rash is seen.

How Long can the Virus Can be Spread?

The virus can be spread to people who have not had chickenpox until the lesions become dry and crusty. To prevent spread, cover the rash, avoid touching the affected area, and wash your hands often.

How Long Should Infected People Stay Away From Work or School?

If you have a rash that can't be covered, stay home from work and school until 7 days after the rash starts and until all the lesions have become crusty.

Information adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.