

# FACT SHEET

# Shingles

## What is shingles?

Shingles (herpes zoster) is a painful rash that develops on one side of the face or body. Shingles is caused by the varicella-zoster virus, the same virus that causes chickenpox. Stress, trauma, sunlight, immunosuppression and advancing age can cause reactivation of the virus and produce shingles. Shingles can occur at any age but is more prevalent in the elderly and immunocompromised individuals.

## How is it spread?

Anyone who has had chickenpox in the past can develop shingles. Shingles cannot be passed from one person to another. However, the virus that causes shingles (varicella-zoster) can be passed from a person with active shingles and cause chickenpox in a person who has never had chickenpox or has never been vaccinated against chickenpox.

The virus can be spread by direct contact with the fluid from the fluid-filled blisters or indirect contact with articles soiled by fluid from blisters. A person is contagious during the blister phase of the disease. They are no longer contagious once the blisters have scabbed over. The blisters usually scab over in 7-10 days and are completely gone in 2-4 weeks.

*This fact sheet is for informational purposes only and is not intended for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).*

## What are the symptoms?

- Several days before rash appears, pain, itching, or tingling in the area where the rash will appear may occur.
- Rash in the shape of a single stripe around the left or right side of the body or side of face.
- Fever
- Headache
- Chills
- Upset stomach

## How is it prevented?

A shingles vaccine is recommended for persons 50 and older.

Several precautions can be taken to prevent the spread of the virus.

- Cover draining blisters with a protective dressing.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after contact with the blisters, dressings, or clothing.
- Disinfect and wash clothing and surfaces after contact with the fluid from blisters.

## How is it treated?

Antiviral medications can shorten the duration and severity of symptoms and pain of shingles. These medicines are more effective if taken as soon as possible once the rash appears. Over-the-counter or prescription pain medicine may help relieve the pain caused by shingles.

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