



Shingles

What is Shingles?

Shingles is a painful skin rash caused by the varicella zoster virus. The varicella zoster virus is the same organism that causes chickenpox. After a person recovers from the chickenpox, the virus stays in the body. Usually the virus does not cause any problems, however the virus can reappear later, causing shingles.

A person who has shingles can give chicken pox to an unimmunized person through direct contact with shingles blisters or articles soiled by discharge from blisters.

Persons with shingles may be contagious for a week after the appearance of fluid-filled blisters.

What should I do if I have Shingles?

- Cover affected draining lesions (sores) with protective dressings.
- Good hand washing after contact with lesions or dressings.
- Disinfection of articles soiled with discharge from lesions.

How is Shingles treated?

Several antiviral medications are available to treat shingles. These medications should be started as soon as possible after the rash appears in order to shorten the duration and severity of the illness. Varicella Immune Globulin (VIG) may be recommended for immunocompromised contacts since it may prevent or reduce symptoms of the disease.

How can Shingles be prevented?

- The CDC recommends Zostavax, a shingles vaccine in persons 60 years of age and older to prevent shingles.

- The FDA has approved the Zostavax vaccine, prescribed by a physician, for people 50 and older.
- Get the chickenpox vaccine (Varivax). The vaccine is recommended for children, adolescents, and adults without a reliable history of chickenpox. If a person never gets the chicken pox, they can't get the shingles.

Symptoms of Shingles:

- Chills, fever, fatigue and gastrointestinal symptoms may be present 3-5 days before rash develops.
- Numbness, itching, and severe pain on one side of your body, followed by clusters of blister-like lesions.
- A rash occurs in chickenpox-like crops, most often on the chest and waist area and spreads in a linear pattern.
- The rash changes to fluid-filled blisters called vesicles 1-2 days later.
- Vesicles dry and scab about 5 days after onset. There is often severe deep pain in the rash area due to irritation of the nerves.

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