

Key Points about Shingles

- **Shingles is NOT contagious**-the chicken pox virus in the blisters can be dangerous for babies under 12 months and pregnant women
- **Shingles should be treated right away**
- **Pain can be severe and difficult to treat**
- **Ask your doctor about the new vaccine for shingles, FDA approved for people over 60**

For more information go to...

www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/shingles

www.theacpa.org

www.vzvfoundation.org

www.paincare.org



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Shingles

a.k.a. Herpes Zoster

What Every Patient Should Know



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

What is Shingles?

Shingles is another name for a condition called herpes zoster. It is a painful rash that is caused by the virus that causes chicken pox. After a person gets chicken pox or gets vaccinated for chicken pox, the virus lives in some of your body's nerve cells. Normally, your body keeps the virus from spreading out of the nerve cells. When people get older or their immune system gets weak from disease or medications, the virus can become active, and lead to the painful rash. Although shingles is not contagious, the chicken pox virus in the blisters is contagious for people that have not had chicken pox or been vaccinated. You should stay away from babies younger than 12 months and pregnant women.



How would I know if I have Shingles?

Shingles can start with a burning, tingling sensation even before you start to see the rash. The rash appears as reddish bumps that turn into blisters after a couple days. The rash is typically limited to one area and side of your body or face. After 7-10 days, the blisters should crust over and fall off. The pain may continue after the rash goes away, but should resolve in 1-3 months.

How is it Treated?

Shingles is treated with antiviral medications that target the virus. There are a few different types of antiviral medications that can work, your doctor can help you decide which one will work best for you. You should see your doctor as soon as possible, because the treatment works better the earlier it is started. It should usually be started within the first 3 days.

Along with treating the virus, there can be significant pain that needs treating too. You can try over-the-counter pain medication, such as Tylenol or ibuprofen. Lotions such as

benadryl and caladryl can also help with pain and itching. If the pain is severe, your doctor may prescribe stronger pain medication.

What if the pain does not go away?

Pain lasting longer than 1-3 months is called postherpetic neuralgia. This pain can be very severe and disabling for patients. The pain will be similar to shingles, burning and stabbing and your skin can feel very sensitive to touch.

This pain can be difficult to treat and you may have to work with your doctor to try different things and see what works best for you. Some of the over the counter options are Tylenol or ibuprofen or capsaicin cream.

If the pain is severe, your doctor can prescribe a patch with lidocaine that numbs your skin, or prescribe medications that help with nerve pain, such as neurontin or amitriptyline. These medications are also used to treat depression or seizures and can take a few weeks to work or have side effects. It is important to talk with your doctor about which ones might work for you.

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Abstract: Shingles is a painful rash characterized by red bumps that turn into blisters and resolves within 7-10 days. It is caused by a herpes virus that causes chicken pox and is more common in elderly or people with weak immune systems. It is treated with antiviral medication. The pain can last longer than the rash and can be severe. There are different types of treatment for the pain that you should talk to your doctor about.

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