

Shingles

Shingles is one of the diseases caused by the varicella zoster virus (VZV), the same virus that causes chickenpox. 1 out of 3 people in the U.S. will develop shingles. You can get shingles even if you have had chickenpox and your risk increases as you get older.

What are the symptoms?

Shingles causes a painful, blistering rash. Other symptoms can include fever, headache, chills, and upset stomach. Before the rash develops, itching, tingling or pain may occur in the area. The rash begins with raised reddish bumps which become blisters. It usually appears only on one side of the body. The blisters crust over and fall off after 7 to 10 days. Some people continue to have pain even after the rash is gone. The rash is usually fully cleared up in 2 to 4 weeks.

How is shingles spread?

Shingles cannot be passed from one person to another. When a person has chickenpox, the virus stays in the body and can become active later in life causing shingles. However, the virus that causes shingles can cause chickenpox in someone who has never had chickenpox through touching the rash. A person with shingles can spread the virus when the rash is in the blister-phase. Once the rash has developed crusts, the person is no longer contagious.

What can be done to prevent spread of the virus?

To prevent the spread of shingles avoid touching the rash. washing sheets and clothing of infected person in hot soapy water daily and washing hands often when around someone with shingles.

Who can get shingles?

Anyone who has recovered from chickenpox may develop shingles, including children. It is more common in people 50 years old and older. The risk of getting shingles increases as a person gets older. People with certain conditions that affect the immune system or people on immunosuppressive drugs such as steroids or drugs given after organ transplantation are at a greater risk of developing shingles. Complications such as long-term nerve pain happens in around 10 to 18% of cases and are most often in older adults.

What is the treatment for shingles?

Several antiviral medicines are available to treat shingles, such as acyclovir (Zovirax), valacyclovir (Valtrex), and famciclovir (Famvir). These medications must be ordered by a physician and should be started as soon as possible. Treatment will help to shorten how long the illness lasts and how severe the illness is. Your physician may also prescribe pain medicine to help with pain caused by shingles. Additionally, people 50 years and older can get the shingles vaccine.