

What is shingles?

Shingles is an infection caused by the reactivation of varicella-zoster (chickenpox) virus within the body of someone who previously had chickenpox. The virus remains hidden in the body after chickenpox infection for many years and reoccurs later as shingles.

Who is at risk for shingles?

Although it is most common in people older than 50, if you have had chickenpox, you are at risk for developing shingles. Shingles is also more common in people with weakened immune systems from HIV infection, chemotherapy or radiation treatment, transplant operations, and stress. Receiving a shingles vaccine reduces the risk of developing the disease.

What are the symptoms of shingles?

Shingles causes blisters and red bumps, usually in a narrow area on half of the body. The lesions may be severely itchy and/or painful.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Shingles usually occurs many years after a person has had chickenpox.

How is shingles spread?

Shingles is spread through direct contact with the blisters of an infected person. Shingles can cause chickenpox in people who have not been vaccinated or who have not had chickenpox.

When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?

A person is able to spread the virus until the blisters are covered with scabs.

How is a person diagnosed?

A health care provider will diagnose shingles. Sometimes a laboratory test is needed.

What is the treatment?

The severity of shingles and how long the infection lasts can be significantly reduced if you are treated immediately with antiviral drugs. Antiviral drugs also may help hold off the painful after-effects of shingles. Other treatments may also be used to treat the symptoms of shingles.

Does past infection make a person immune?

No.

Should children or others be excluded from child care, school, work or other activities if they have shingles?

No, unless the rash cannot be covered. Children and staff who are excluded may return after the rash has crusted. If the child is unable to participate in routine activities, the child should be excluded until well.

What can be done to prevent the spread of shingles disease?

1. People age 60 and older are recommended to be vaccinated against shingles. Most insurance companies and Medicare Part D cover the shingles vaccine (Zostavax[®]).
2. Good hand washing is an effective way to prevent the spread of shingles.
3. People who have not previously had chickenpox or who have not been vaccinated against chickenpox should contact their health care provider to be vaccinated. Vaccination against chickenpox within three to five days after exposure to shingles may prevent the disease from occurring.
4. Pregnant women or people with weakened immune systems who have not previously had chickenpox or who have not been vaccinated and who are exposed to shingles should notify their health-care provider immediately.

Additional Information:

Additional information is available at www.ndhealth.gov/disease or by calling the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

Resource:

American Academy of Pediatrics. [Varicella-Zoster Virus Infections.] In: Kimberlin DW, Brady MT, Jackson MA, Long SS, eds. *Red Book: 2015 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 30th ed. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2015: 846-860.