

Shingles is caused by the varicella zoster virus (VZV). This is the same virus that causes chickenpox. 1 out of every 3 people in the U.S. will get shingles (herpes zoster) in their lifetime.

Shingles (Herpes Zoster)


If you have had chickenpox, you can get shingles. Even children can get shingles. For some people over age 60, shingles will cause severe pain which can last for months, even years.

Who is at risk?

You have a high risk of getting shingles if:

- ▶ Your immune system doesn't work well.
- ▶ You have human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).
- ▶ You take drugs that suppress your immune system.

Most people have just one outbreak of shingles in their lifetime, but some can have more.



There are about 1 million cases of shingles every year in the U.S.

What are signs of shingles?

- ▶ Most get a painful rash or blisters on one side of the body. These scab over in 7-10 days and clear in 2-4 weeks.
- ▶ There can be pain, itching or tingling in the rash/blister area. This can happen 1-5 days before it can be seen.
- ▶ The rash/blister can occur:
 - in a single patch or a stripe around the left side of the body.
 - in a single patch or a stripe around the right side of the body.
 - on one side of the face.
- ▶ In rare cases, the rash can look like chickenpox.

Other signs that are not always present may include:

- ▶ Fever.
- ▶ Headache.
- ▶ General ill feeling.
- ▶ Joint pain.
- ▶ Muscle weakness.

Can I give it to someone else?

The virus that causes shingles can be spread from a person with active shingles to a person who has never had chickenpox. The person exposed may get chickenpox but not shingles.

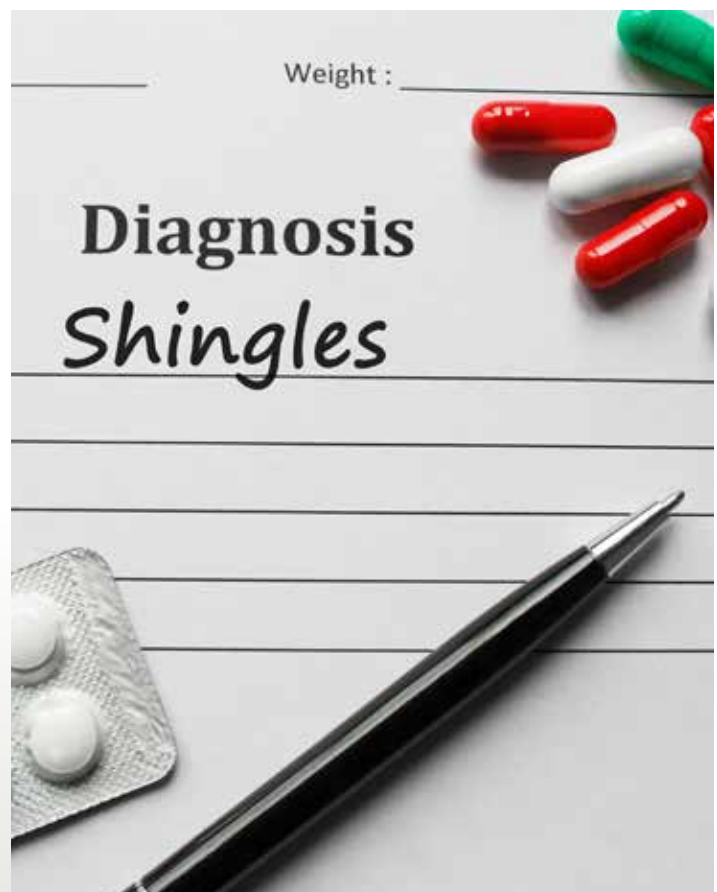
The virus is spread by direct contact with fluid from the blisters caused by shingles.

- ▶ Shingles does not spread before the blisters appear.
- ▶ When the blisters dry up (crust over) the person can no longer spread the virus.

What can happen if you have it for a long time?

- ▶ Shingles that occurs on the face or scalp can affect the eye and cause a loss of vision.
- ▶ Rarely, it can lead to pneumonia, hearing problems, brain inflammation, and even death.

Shingles is less contagious than chickenpox. The chance of spread is very low if the rash/blister is covered.



If you have shingles:

- ▶ Keep the rash/blisters covered.
- ▶ Avoid touching or scratching the rash/blisters.
- ▶ Wash your hands often to prevent the spread of the zoster virus.
- ▶ Avoid contact with these people until the rash/blisters is crusted:
 - Pregnant women who have never had chickenpox or the chickenpox vaccine.
 - Children under the age of one.
 - Old children who have not been vaccinated for chickenpox.
 - Premature or low birth weight infants.
 - Those with weak immune systems.
 - Those undergoing chemotherapy.
 - Those who have had an organ transplant.
 - Those with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection.

Can shingles be prevented?

Talk with your healthcare provider (HCP) about the shingles zoster vaccine.

What is the treatment?

Antiviral medicines such as acyclovir, valacyclovir, and famciclovir can reduce the length and severity of shingles. For best effect, these must be started **as soon as possible** after the rash/blister appears. Contact your HCP as soon as possible.

Other treatments:

- ▶ Medicines for pain.
- ▶ Antihistamines for itching.
- ▶ Wet compresses, Calamine Lotion, and Colloidal oatmeal baths for itching.



Shingles usually clears in 2-3 weeks.

Learn more:

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA):

My HealtheVet Veterans Health Library – Health Encyclopedia

http://www.veteranshealthlibrary.org/Encyclopedia/142,89203_VA

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

Shingles (Herpes Zoster)

<http://www.cdc.gov/shingles/index.html>

Fact Sheet on Shingles

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/patient-ed/adults/downloads/fs-shingles.pdf>

National Institute of Health-Senior Health:

About Shingles

<http://nihseniorhealth.gov/shingles/aboutshingles/01.html>

U.S. National Library of Medicine – Medline Plus:

Shingles

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000858.htm>