

SHINGLES (HERPES ZOSTER) FACT SHEET

What is shingles?

Shingles is caused by the varicella zoster virus (VZV), the same virus that causes chickenpox. After a person recovers from chickenpox, the virus stays dormant (inactive) in the body. For reasons that are not fully known, the virus can reactivate years later, causing shingles. Shingles is not caused by the same virus that causes genital herpes, a sexually transmitted disease.

What are the symptoms of shingles?

Shingles is a **painful rash** that develops on one side of the face or body. The rash forms blisters that typically scab over in 7 to 10 days and clears up within 2 to 4 weeks. Before the rash develops, people often have pain, itching, or tingling in the area where the rash will develop. Other symptoms of shingles can include fever, headache, chills, or upset stomach.

Who can get shingles?

Anyone who has recovered from chickenpox may develop shingles; even children can get shingles. However the risk of shingles increases as you get older. About half of all cases occur in men and women 60 years old or older.

How is shingles spread?

Shingles cannot be passed from one person to another. However, the virus that causes shingles, the varicella zoster virus, can be spread from a person with active shingles to another person who has never had chickenpox. In such cases, the person exposed to the virus might develop chickenpox, but they would not develop shingles. The virus is spread through direct contact with fluid from the rash blisters caused by shingles.

Is there treatment for shingles?

Yes, antiviral medication is available. To be effective, they must be started as soon as possible after the rash appears. Thus, people who have or think they might have shingles should call their healthcare provider as soon as possible to discuss treatment options.

How can shingles be prevented?

Get a **shingles vaccine if you are 60 years of age or older**, regardless of whether you recall having had chickenpox or not.

If you have shingles:

- Keep the rash covered.
- Avoid touching or scratching the rash.
- Wash your hands often to prevent the spread of varicella zoster virus.
- Until your rash has developed crusts, avoid contact with
 - pregnant women who have never had chickenpox or the chickenpox vaccine;
 - premature or low birth weight infants; and
 - people with weakened immune systems, such as people receiving immunosuppressive medications or undergoing chemotherapy, organ transplant recipients, and people with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection.

For more information please contact Contra Costa Public Health at 925-313-6740 and visit our website at <http://cchealth.org/cd/> or <http://www.cdc.gov/shingles/index.html>
For vaccine information: <http://www.cdc.gov/Vaccines/vpd-vac/shingles/default.htm>