

Shingles (Herpes Zoster)

What is **Shingles**?



Shingles is caused by the chickenpox virus that remains in the nerve root of all persons who had chickenpox and can come out in your body again years later to cause illness. Shingles is more common after the age of 50 and the risk increases with advancing age. Shingles causes numbness, itching or severe pain followed by clusters of blister-like lesions in a strip-like pattern on one side of your body. The pain can persist for weeks, months or years after the rash heals and is then known as postherpetic neuralgia.

Is **Shingles** contagious?

Yes, people with shingles are contagious to persons who have not had chickenpox. Therefore, people who have not had chickenpox can catch chickenpox if they have close contact with a person who has shingles. However, you can not catch shingles itself from someone else. Shingles is

caused by the chickenpox virus which has been dormant (staying quiet) in your body ever since you had chicken pox. So you get shingles from your own chickenpox virus, not from someone else.

What should I do if I get **Shingles?** Contact your health care provider as soon as possible to discuss treatment with antiviral medications. These medications are most effective if given as soon as possible after the rash onset.

Can someone who has been vaccinated for chickenpox develop **Shingles?**

Yes. However, a study conducted among children with leukemia determined that after receiving the vaccine these children were much less likely to develop shingles than children who had prior natural chickenpox. Available information from healthy children and adults suggest that shingles is less common in vaccinated healthy persons compared with persons who have had natural chickenpox.

Is there a vaccine available to prevent or modify **Shingles?**

No; however, a study is currently underway with a new formulation of chickenpox vaccine to determine whether vaccination of persons older than 55 years of age will reduce the frequency and/or severity of shingles in adults. Persons with impaired immune systems or those who are pregnant should contact their physician for questions concerning exposure.