



For Staff /Patient Education

Herpes Zoster

Shingles

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What is it?



- **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.
 - 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.
 - Most commonly, the rash occurs in a single stripe around either the left or the right side of the body. In other cases, the rash occurs on one side of the face. In rare cases (usually among people with weakened immune systems), the rash may be more widespread and look similar to a chickenpox rash. Shingles can affect the eye and cause loss of vision.
- Other symptoms of shingles can include: fever; headache; chills; upset stomach
 - Only people who had natural infection with wild-type VZV or had varicella vaccination can develop herpes zoster.

How is it spread?

- The varicella zoster virus, can be spread from a person with active shingles to another person who has never had chickenpox through direct contact with fluid from the rash blisters or indirect contact through articles freshly soiled with discharge from vesicles.
- In such cases, the person exposed to the virus might develop chickenpox, but they would not develop shingles.
- A person with active shingles can spread the virus when the rash is in the blister-phase. A person is not infectious before the blisters appear. Once the rash has developed crusts, the person is no longer contagious.
- Shingles is less contagious than chickenpox and the risk of a person with shingles spreading the virus is low if the rash is covered.

Where is it found?

- Humans are the only reservoir of the virus, and disease occurs only in humans

Prevention & Control:

- The only way to reduce the risk of developing shingles and the long-term pain from post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN) is to get vaccinated.
- People with active herpes zoster lesions should avoid contact with susceptible people in their household and in occupational settings until their lesions dry and crusted.
- Keep the rash covered. The risk of a person with shingles spreading the virus is low if the rash is 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.
- Refer to IPC Manual, Employee Health Policy (IC-E 001), Attachment 6.2, Work Restrictions for Healthcare Workers

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



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