



In this document the term patient is inclusive of patient, resident and client.

What is shingles and how do I get it?

- Shingles, also known as herpes zoster, is a reactivation of the varicella zoster virus (VZV). It is the virus that causes chickenpox. If you get infected with VZV, after the initial illness (chickenpox), the virus stays in your nerve cells.
- Most of the time your body will keep the virus trapped in the nerve cells. However, as you get older, or if your immune system gets weak, VZV may escape from the cells and cause shingles. Trauma and stress can also trigger an attack. It is possible to get shingles more than once.

What are the signs and symptoms of shingles?

- People with shingles often experience pain, tingling or itching, and then a painful rash. The rash can occur anywhere on the face or body, although it is usually in one strip on the right or left side.
- The rash begins with reddish bumps. In a few days, these bumps turn into blisters. The blisters usually crust over and fall off after 7 to 10 days.
- Scratching the rash may lead to a secondary infection if bacteria get into the sores.
- Shingles on the face can affect your eyes, causing swollen eyelids, redness, and pain. People who have shingles in the eye should see an eye doctor right away to help avoid complications.
- Pain around the rash site can stay even once the rash goes away. In most people, this pain will go away in 1 to 3 months. Some people may experience pain for a long time, and their skin can become very sensitive to temperature changes and touch.

How is shingles spread?

- VZV is spread by direct contact with fluid in the blisters, or surfaces that have been contaminated by the fluid. If the sores are uncovered, or are spread over a large part of the body, the virus may also be spread through the air.
- You can only spread shingles to someone who has never had chickenpox. That person will develop chickenpox, not shingles. Shingles does not cause shingles in another person.
- Once the lesions crust over they are no longer considered infectious or contagious.

How can I protect myself from shingles?

- The best protection from shingles is vaccination. People may still get shingles after receiving the vaccine, but it is typically less severe.





Can shingles be treated?

- Antiviral medications are available and should be started 24 to 72 hours after the onset of the rash.
- Early treatment may decrease the severity of your illness.
- The pain may also be treated with over-the-counter medicines and creams. Speak to your pharmacist to get recommendations on these treatments.

What happens if I have shingles in a healthcare facility?

- Staff and visitors may wear personal protective equipment (PPE) according to the sign on your door.
- Everyone is reminded to clean their hands before going into your room, and after leaving your room.
- Attending activities with other patients is usually possible, if the lesions can be covered.
- If the lesions cannot be covered, you are severe immune compromised, and/or the rash is extensive (disseminated herpes zoster), you may be required to stay in your room with the door closed.

What should I do at home?

- Consult your healthcare provider as they may recommend antiviral treatment to reduce the duration of symptoms.
- If the fluid from blisters comes into contact with people in your home who are not immune to chickenpox, especially those who are immune compromised or pregnant, they should contact their local Public Health office or health care provider immediately.

