



Shingles

MU Patient Education Series

Definition:

Shingles is an extremely contagious illness caused by the same virus that causes the chicken pox, the varicella-zoster virus. This condition is a reappearance and reactivation of the chicken pox virus. Shingles are painful skin rashes that blister and boil over. The condition usually occurs in anyone who has had chicken pox and is more common in adults. The virus can spread to those who have not had the chicken pox. After being infected, the person will develop chicken pox, not shingles.

CAUSES:

Once you have chicken pox, you usually never get it again. The chicken pox virus remains inactive in your nerves. Later in life, though, it is possible for the virus to reactivate for unknown reasons in the form of shingles. Since the virus for the shingles and the chicken pox is the same, an individual who comes in contact with the shingles can also acquire the chicken pox. You are most likely to acquire the shingles when you are an adult or your immune system is weakened.

SIGNS/SYMPTOMS:

Shingles usually start with an achy, burning pain on one side of your body. Shortly after, red patches begin to form a rash on your skin. These red rashes turn into blisters, which pus and crust over. Once the blisters crust over, the contagious period ends. This typically takes about two weeks. In addition to the rashes and blistering, the follow symptoms may also be present:

- Fever
- Chills
- Headache
- Joint pain
- Abdominal pain



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- Taste and vision difficulties
- Muscle weakness
- Fatigue

TREATMENT/CARE:

Medications can be used to combat the virus and ease your pain. Be sure to finish your full prescription. There are also anti-inflammatory medications that can help reduce the swelling and rash. You may also use hot compresses, oatmeal baths or calamine lotion to relieve your pain and discomfort.

CALL YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER IF...

It is critical that you monitor your condition. Note any change in your rash and be sure to keep your physician updated. If you notice any signs of infection such as yellow or white blistering, vomiting, severe joint pain, trouble breathing, or if the pain and rash develop near an eye call your healthcare provider immediately.

DISCLAIMER:

Medline does not practice medicine, and no information presented on this website is medical advice or intended as a substitute for the advice of a physician.