



For Staff Education

Shingles

(Herpes-Zoster)

What is it?

- Shingles is caused by the varicella zoster virus (VZV), the same one that causes chickenpox
- When a person recovers from chickenpox, the virus stays in the body in an inactive state and may reactivate years later as herpes zoster (shingles)
- Shingles presents as a painful skin rash that usually appears on one side of the face or body, scabs after 3 to 5 days and resolves in 2 to 4 weeks
- Pain is the most predominant symptom and it can last for months
- Other symptoms include a burning or tingling sensation, fever, headache, chills and upset stomach

How is it spread?

- Shingles cannot be passed from one person to another
- The virus that causes shingles, VZV, can be spread from a person with shingles to a person who has never had chickenpox through direct contact with the rash while it is draining or by indirect contact through articles freshly soiled with discharge from vesicles
- *The person exposed would develop chickenpox, not shingles*
- Once crusts form on the rash, the person is no longer contagious
- People who have medical conditions that keep the immune system from working properly, including cancer, leukemia, lymphoma, and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infections, or people who receive drugs that weaken the immune system, such as steroids and drugs given after organ transplantation, are also at greater risk to get shingles

Where is it found?

- Infected people are the source of the varicella zoster virus
- Anyone who has recovered from chickenpox may develop shingles, including children
- Shingles most commonly occurs in people 50 years old or older

Prevention and control

- Ask your healthcare provider or Occupational Health Department about the Shingles vaccination
- Cover draining rash
- Use routine practices
- Clean hands well and often with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water
- If identified early, some medications may be effective for treatment of shingles