

SHINGLES (ZOSTER)

Reportable to local or state health department

Consult the health department before posting or distributing the Parent/Guardian fact sheet.

Shingles (zoster) is caused by the varicella-zoster virus that remains inactive (dormant) in the body of people who have had chickenpox (varicella). A person gets shingles from their own chickenpox virus, not from someone else's. Shingles usually occurs when the immune system is weakened for various reasons, including certain illnesses, treatments, or aging. Although shingles usually occurs in adulthood, children who were infected with varicella in utero or during infancy may develop shingles during childhood.

CAUSE Varicella-zoster virus (VZV), a member of the herpesvirus family.

SYMPTOMS Severe pain, itching, and numbness along certain nerve pathways, commonly involving a narrow area on one side of the body. About 1 to 3 days later, a red rash appears at the site. Clusters of blisters appear soon after, usually on one side of the body and closer together than in chickenpox. The blisters dry out and crust over within a few days. The rash and pain usually disappear within 3 to 5 weeks.

Shingles is a milder illness in children than in adults, but it can be a serious illness in those who have weakened immune systems.

SPREAD A person must have already had chickenpox disease in the past to develop shingles. Shingles does not spread from one person to another as shingles. When susceptible people (those who have not had chickenpox or the varicella vaccine) have direct contact with the fluid from the shingles blisters, they can develop chickenpox.

INCUBATION None. The virus can remain in the body in an inactive state for many years after the original chickenpox infection. Shingles occurs when the varicella-zoster virus reactivates.

CONTAGIOUS PERIOD In an otherwise healthy person, from the start of the rash until all the blisters have crusted. Shingles is less contagious than chickenpox and the risk of a person with shingles spreading the virus is low if the rash is covered.

EXCLUSION Childcare and School: None, if blisters can be completely covered by clothing or a bandage. If blisters **cannot** be covered, exclude until the blisters have crusted. Persons with severe, disseminated shingles should be excluded regardless of whether the sores can be covered.

TREATMENT Antiviral medications may be prescribed.

Do not give aspirin or other salicylate containing medications to any child or adolescent under 18 years of age.

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PREVENTION/CONTROL

- Pregnant women or persons with weakened immune systems who are not immune to varicella (those who have not had chickenpox disease or varicella vaccine in the past) and are exposed to the shingles virus should call their health care provider immediately for possible treatment (See Varicella and Pregnancy fact sheet).
- Other susceptible persons (those who have not had chickenpox or varicella vaccine in the past) who have been exposed to someone with shingles should call their health care provider immediately. Getting varicella vaccine within 3 days, and possibly up to 5 days, of exposure may prevent disease in these people.
- People with shingles should keep the lesions covered and should avoid scratching or touching the lesions.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after contact with fluid from blisters or sores. **Thorough handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases**
- Shingles vaccine is recommended for people age 60 years and older who previously had chickenpox.
- Clean and disinfect all objects and surfaces contaminated with blister fluid at least daily and when soiled (See Section 2).

For more information, call Hennepin County HSPHD-Epidemiology at (612) 543-5230 or call your local health department.

