

Shingles

What is it?

- It is a condition caused by reactivation of the chickenpox virus (varicella-Zoster virus) in people who have previously had chickenpox. Shingles occurs more commonly in elderly persons and individuals with weak immune systems.
- Only individuals who have had chickenpox can develop shingles. After infection with chickenpox, the virus stays in the body and can flare up again, causing shingles often many years after a person has had chickenpox. The virus tends to reactivate when a person's immune system is weakened because of another health problem.

How is it spread?

- A person who has direct contact with the fluid filled blisters can get **chickenpox** if he/she has never had chickenpox before. The virus can sometimes be passed indirectly through articles soiled by fluid from blisters.

What are the symptoms?

- It starts with a burning pain and/or tingling and extreme sensitivity in one area of the skin before the rash develops. The rash then appears as groups of fluid filled blisters on top of a reddened skin base. The blisters eventually crust over and disappear, usually within 2-4 weeks.
- The blister-like rash commonly appears in one strip on the right or left side of the body, however they can appear on other areas of the body as well. Some people may experience pain around the rash side for weeks to months.

When do symptoms start?

- Individuals with **no** immunity to the virus are at risk of developing **chickenpox** (not shingles), within 10 to 21 days after exposure.

How long is it contagious?

- As long as 5 days but usually 1-2 days before the onset of the rash and continuing until all lesions are crusted (usually 7-10 days).
- While contagious, avoid contact with newborns, pregnant women, persons with no known history of

chickenpox and persons with weak immune systems e.g. illnesses such as cancer.

- You cannot get shingles from exposure to shingles. If you've never had chickenpox, you can get chickenpox from an exposure to shingles.

How is it treated?

- If symptoms develop, contact your health care provider for assessment, diagnosis, and treatment. In some cases an anti-viral may be prescribed.

You may need to stay home from childcare, school, work, or group activities.

For further information, please contact the Communicable Disease Control Program staff at 705-474-1400 or 1-800-563-2808, ext 5229.

References:

Heymann D. editor. 2015. *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual*. 20th Ed. Washington: American Public Health Association.

Pickering LK, Baker CJ, Kimberlain DW, and Long SS. 2015 *Red Book: 2015 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 30th Ed. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics

Fact Sheet for WI-CDC-011 – 2018-08-10