



# Fact Sheet: Shingles

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## What is shingles?

Shingles (Herpes Zoster) is an infection caused by the same virus that causes chickenpox. Anyone who has recovered from chickenpox, can develop shingles because the virus stays inactive within the body. The risk of developing the disease increases with age.

## How is it transmitted?

Shingles is less contagious than the chickenpox, and cannot be transmitted from one person to another. However, the virus from a patient with shingles may cause chickenpox in someone who has never had chickenpox or has not been vaccinated.

The virus is spread through direct contact with fluid from the blisters which appear as a rash. A person is not infectious to others before the blisters appear. Once crusts/scabs develop over the rash, the person is no longer infectious or contagious.

## How can shingles be prevented?

To reduce the risk of contracting shingles, avoid being in contact with someone who has the disease, and do not touch the fluid-filled blisters, rash or items that may have been in contact with the blisters such as clothing or towels.

Anyone with a rash, must keep the area covered with a bandage or cloth while around others until scabs appear. It is recommended that healthy adults 50 years and older get the shingles vaccine to protect against the disease.

## What are the symptoms of shingles?

- Tingling feeling on the skin
- Itchiness
- Stabbing pain
- Fever

- Chills
- Tiredness
- Headache
- Upset stomach

People may have symptoms 1 to 5 days before the rash appears which is often on the chest, face, lower back or waist area in a line-like pattern involving one side of the body

The rash is painful with fluid-filled blisters that dry and crusts over in, approximately, 7 to 10 days. The rash usually fades away within 2 to 4 weeks.

## How is shingles treated?

Most cases of shingles resolve on their own without specific treatment. Pain relieving medications or anti-itching cream can be used. People who are immunocompromised or pregnant should contact their healthcare provider, especially since antiviral drugs may need to be prescribed.

## Are there any complications from shingles?

Pain at the site of the rash may persist for weeks, months or years in older adults because of the nerves involved around the area. There is also a risk of scarring from the blisters and rash. People with weak immune systems may have repeated cases of shingles or have widespread appearance of the rash in multiple areas on the body. Anyone with shingles near the eyes should see a doctor immediately due to the risk of vision loss.

Detroit Health Department  
3245 E. Jefferson Suite 100  
Detroit, Michigan 48207  
313-876-4000  
[www.detroitmi.gov/health](http://www.detroitmi.gov/health)