

# Shingles

Dear Parent or Guardian,

You are being provided with this fact sheet:

**because you or your child may have been exposed to shingles.** If you believe your child has developed shingles, contact your medical provider. Notify your child care provider or preschool immediately after the diagnosis has been made.

**for informational purposes only.**

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## What is shingles?

Shingles is a localized infection due to the same virus (varicella) that causes chickenpox. It occurs only in people who have had chickenpox in the past, or rarely in someone who has had the chickenpox vaccine, and is due to a reactivation of the chickenpox virus. Why the virus reactivates in some individuals and not in others is unknown. Shingles can appear many years after a person has had chickenpox.

## What causes shingles?

Shingles is caused by the chickenpox virus that remains in the nerve roots of a person who had chickenpox. The virus can become active in your body again years later causing shingles.

## What are the symptoms of shingles?

The first symptom is often a tingling feeling on the skin, itchiness, or a stabbing pain. After several days, a rash appears as a band or patch of raised bumps on the side of the body or face. It then develops into small, fluid-filled blisters that dry out and crust over within a few days. When the rash is at its peak, symptoms can range from mild itching to severe pain. The rash and pain usually disappear within three to five weeks.

## How is shingles spread?

People with shingles are contagious to persons who have no immunity to chickenpox. Therefore, people who have not had chickenpox or who have *not* had the varicella (chickenpox) vaccine can catch chickenpox if they have close contact with the blisters of a person who has shingles. The virus is spread through direct contact with fluid from the rash blisters.

A person must have already had chickenpox in the past to develop shingles. Contact with a person with shingles does not cause another person's chickenpox virus to reactivate. You cannot catch shingles from someone who has shingles. An individual can get shingles from their own chickenpox virus, but not from someone else.

## Who is at risk for shingles?

Anyone who has had chickenpox in the past can get shingles. The disease is primarily seen in persons with weakened immune systems, such as the elderly and those with certain underlying medical conditions. It is estimated that 10-20% of the entire population and up to 50% of those persons who live beyond 80 years will have at least one episode of shingles.

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Adapted from the Snohomish Health District

**When and for how long is a person able to spread the chickenpox virus?**

The virus is present at the site of the shingles rash and is contagious until the blisters become dry and crusted.

**How is shingles treated?**

Most cases of shingles resolve on their own without specific treatment. Physicians can prescribe medications for severe cases in individuals with weakened immune systems.

**What can be done to prevent the spread of shingles?**

Chickenpox must be prevented in order to prevent shingles. A vaccine for chickenpox (varicella vaccine) has been developed and may reduce the risk of developing shingles later in life. This vaccine is recommended for children 12 months and older and adults with no history of chickenpox illness. A shingles vaccine is available for persons age 60 and older.

**To prevent spreading or getting chickenpox from someone infected with shingles:**

- Avoid direct contact with infected blisters. Keep blisters covered. Wear gloves if direct hand contact to blisters is necessary.
- Dispose of bandages in a sealed plastic bag that have been in contact with the blisters.
- Disinfect surfaces that have been in contact with fluid from the blisters.
- Avoid sharing towels and personal items with a person who has shingles.
- Practice good handwashing.

**Exclude from group setting?**

Children with shingles do not need to be excluded unless the blisters cannot be covered or the child meets other exclusion criteria such as fever with behavior change.

**Reference:**

*American Academy of Pediatrics*

Managing Infectious Diseases in Child Care and Schools page 155.

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