

FactSheet

Para Su Información

Shingles (Herpes Zoster)

What is shingles?

Shingles is a disease of the skin produced by the same virus that causes chickenpox. It occurs only in people who have been infected with the chickenpox virus in the past, and it results from a reactivation (renewed activity) of the virus. Why the virus reactivates is unknown.

How do you get it?

What triggers an attack of shingles is unknown. Exposure to someone with active chickenpox does not reactivate the virus to cause shingles. Direct exposure to the fluid in the shingles blisters can cause chickenpox in someone who is unimmunized or has never had chickenpox. Shingles is more often seen in the elderly than in younger adults or children.

What are the symptoms and when do they start?

A first sign of shingles is often a tingling sensation on the skin accompanied by itching or intense stabbing pain. After several days, a patchy rash appears as raised dots on the body or head. In 7 to 12 days, small fluid-filled blisters develop, dry out, and form scabs. The scabs, in turn, fall off in 2 to 3 weeks. The rash and pain usually disappear within 3 to 5 weeks. Although shingles is often very painful, the disease is not considered dangerous to healthy individuals. However, anyone experiencing a shingles attack close to eyes should promptly seek the medical attention of an eye doctor.

For how long is a person contagious?

A person with shingles is contagious until no new blisters have appeared and old ones have crusted over.

How can a person avoid infecting others?

A person with shingles can avoid infecting others by thoroughly washing their hands after touching the blisters and keeping the blisters covered so that nobody is exposed to the blister fluid.

What is the treatment for shingles?

Most people with shingles get better on their own without treatment. Sometimes, specific antiviral medications prescribed by a doctor may shorten the duration and lessen the severity of the illness.

If you get shingles once, can you get it again?

Yes. Although many individuals who get shingles experience only a single attack, others can have multiple attacks over time. It is thought that a person's immune system is involved in protecting against reactivation of the virus.

How can you keep from getting it?

At this time, there is nothing you can do to avoid developing shingles once you have gotten the virus during chickenpox. A vaccine for chickenpox has been approved for use in the United States. The impact of the chickenpox vaccine on the occurrence of shingles is unknown at this time.

Where can I obtain more information?

Contact your doctor or the Southern Nevada Health District, Office of Epidemiology at (702) 759-1300.



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