



Herpes zoster (Shingles)

What is Herpes zoster (Shingles)

Herpes zoster, also known as shingles or zoster, is a viral infection caused by the same virus that causes chicken pox.

Who can get shingles?

You can only get shingles if you have previously had chickenpox.

The chickenpox virus remains inactive in certain nerve root cells of the body and only when it reactivates does shingles occur. About 20 percent of those people who have had chicken pox will get shingles at some time during their lives.

Most people will get shingles only once but it can occur more than once.

You can not get shingles from someone who has shingles.

You can not get shingles from someone who has chickenpox-you get chickenpox from someone with chickenpox.

What causes Shingles?

People with a weakened immunity for any reason are more prone to develop shingles. Although children can get shingles, it is more common in people over the age 50. Illness, trauma, certain drugs and stress may also trigger a shingles attack.

What are the symptoms of Shingles?

Shingles causes numbness, itching or severe pain followed by clusters of blister-like lesions in a strip-like pattern on one side of your body.

The pain can persist for weeks, months or years after the rash heals.

The rash may affect any part of the body, including head and limbs. It may thus appear as a band around one side of the chest or abdomen, or down an arm or leg. It may affect the head, and when it affects the upper cheek or the side of the forehead it may also affect the eye.

Is shingles contagious?

Shingles spreads only from the rash. A person with shingles cannot transmit the virus by breathing or coughing.

People can catch chickenpox from direct exposure to a shingles rash during the active phase when blisters have erupted but have not formed dry crusts.

Therefore, a person exposed to someone who has shingles can contract chickenpox if the person exposed has never had chickenpox before.

Treatment

The treatment goals for active shingles infection are to reduce pain and discomfort, hasten healing of the blisters, and prevent the disease from spreading. The Doctor may prescribe pain killers, anti-viral drugs and in addition calamine lotion can help to soothe the area.

Why are the Precautions for Localized Herpes zoster and Disseminated Herpes zoster different?

Disseminated zoster means the shingles are more widespread and there are many more blisters than Localized zoster (shingles). Therefore there is greater opportunity for spread of the chickenpox virus from the blisters to those who are susceptible (have not had chickenpox).

Can outbreaks of shingles happen in a Personal Care Home?

No, outbreaks of shingles cannot occur in a personal care home because one cannot get shingles from persons with shingles. However there may be several residents with shingles because shingles tends to occur in persons with poor immune systems as may be the case with the residents.