

Shingles Fact Sheet

Information for Healthcare Workers

What are shingles?

Shingles is a **viral infection that causes a painful rash**. Shingles can occur anywhere on your body. It typically looks like a single stripe of blisters that wraps around the left side or the right side of your torso. Shingles is caused by the varicella-zoster virus — the same virus that causes chickenpox.

What are signs and symptoms of shingles?

Shingles is a painful rash that develops on one side of the face or body. The rash consists of blisters that typically scab over in 7 to 10 days and fully clears up within 2 to 4 weeks.

Before the rash appears, people often have pain, itching, or tingling in the area where it will develop. This may happen several days before the rash appears.

Most commonly, the rash occurs in a single stripe around either the left or the right side of the body. In other cases, the rash occurs on one side of the face. Shingles on the face can affect the eye and cause vision loss. In rare cases (usually in people with weakened immune systems), the rash may be more widespread on the body and look similar to a chickenpox rash.

Other symptoms of shingles can include

- Fever
- Headache
- Chills
- Upset stomach



How are shingles transmitted?

People get shingles when the varicella zoster virus (VZV), which causes chicken pox, reactivates in their bodies after they have already had chickenpox.

Most people who develop shingles have only one episode during their lifetime. However, you can have shingles more than once.

If you have shingles, direct contact with the fluid from your rash blisters can spread VZV to people who have never had chickenpox or never received the chickenpox vaccine. If they get infected, they will develop chickenpox, not shingles. They could then develop shingles later in life.

The risk of spreading VZV to others is low if you cover the shingles rash. People with shingles cannot spread the virus before their rash blisters appear or after the rash crusts. People with chickenpox are more likely to spread VZV than people with shingles.

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Quick Facts:

- You cannot get shingles from someone who has shingles
- You can get chickenpox from someone who has shingles if you have never had chickenpox or never received the chickenpox vaccine.

To prevent spreading shingles to others:

- Cover the rash.
- Avoid touching or scratching the rash.
- Wash your hands often.
- Avoid contact with the following people until your rash crusts:
 - o pregnant women who have never had chickenpox or the chickenpox vaccine;
 - o premature or low birth weight infants; and
 - o people with weakened immune systems, such as people receiving immunosuppressive medications or undergoing chemotherapy, organ transplant recipients, and people with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection.

Some people have a greater risk of getting shingles. This includes people who

- have medical conditions that keep their immune systems from working properly, such as certain cancers like leukemia and lymphoma, and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)
- receive drugs that keep their immune systems from working properly, such as steroids and drugs that are given after organ transplantation

Can a healthcare worker work with shingles?

- Healthcare workers shall be excluded from work if unable to cover lesions with occlusive dressing and clothing.
- If disseminated shingles, healthcare workers shall be excluded from work until lesions are dried and have crusted.

Localized Shingles:

- Lesions appear along one or more nerve roots.
- Lesions appear in crops in a cluster or in an irregular fashion along nerve root.

Transmission: drainage from lesions, direct & indirect contact,

Contagious Time Period: 1-2 days before onset of rash until all lesions have crusted and no new lesions are forming



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Disseminated Shingles:

- Lesions appear along more than one nerve root and branch outwards off primary root.
- Rash is more severe and prolonged and may involve the throat, mouth and lungs.

Transmission: drainage from lesions, respiratory secretion, and airborne, direct & indirect contact.

Contagious Time Period: 1-2 days before onset of rash until all lesions have crusted and no new lesions are forming



Is there a treatment for shingles?

There are antiviral medications available to shorten the length of disease and reduce symptom severity. It is important that these medications are started as soon as possible after the rash first appears. Contact your health care provider right away if you think you may have shingles. Islanders now can see their pharmacists to be assessed and treated for shingles.

Self-Care for managing shingles.

Keep uncomfortable skin cool by applying a clean, cool, and damp washcloth several times a day. You want to apply it for 5 to 10 minutes each time. Daily gentle cleansing of the blisters with a fragrance-free cleanser reduces the risk of spreading the infection. Take a cool bath or shower to soothe skin. The coolness of the water can ease pain from shingles blisters and calm itchiness.