



# Shingles (Varicella zoster virus)

## Signs and symptoms

Typically these are pain, itching or tingling in the affected skin and can be anywhere in the body, but usually around the stomach, upper back and also affecting the eye area.

Between days 1-4 a rash will appear. The rash develops into a cluster of vesicles (blisters) which continue to form for 3-5 days and burst releasing the virus. The blisters usually crust over but this can persist for 7 days or longer.

## Risk of transmission

**Only a person who has NOT had chickenpox can catch chickenpox from a person with shingles.**

It is not possible to develop shingles from exposure to a person with chickenpox. It is possible however to develop chickenpox as a result of exposure to a person with shingles if that person has not had the chickenpox infection.

A person is only infectious if blisters are weeping, usually between days 5-7 after the onset of shingles and the blisters are **uncovered**. If the area is covered, shingles cannot be passed on to another person.

## Pregnant women, babies and elderly

Pregnant women may be at risk of contracting chickenpox if the mother has never had the virus or has not had the vaccination.

Babies under a month old and immuno-compromised people (those particularly vulnerable to infections such as older people or those with a weakened immune system) would be at risk of contracting the virus through direct contact.

## What to do if you think you have shingles

If you think you have shingles you will need to go to your GP for diagnosis, advice and medication.

## What to do if you have shingles

If you have shingles you should:

- avoid direct skin contact (involving the affected skin area) with pregnant women, immuno-compromised people and babies younger than 1 month old
- keep the rash clean and dry to reduce bacterial infection
- avoid use of topical antibiotics and adhesive dressings that can cause irritation and delay healing
- stay off work/college/school if the rash is weeping and cannot be covered.

Once lesions (wounds) have crusted over or full coverage of the rash is possible (using bandaging not adhesive tape), avoidance of these activities is not necessary.

## **If you are exposed to shingles**

Shingles does not present a problem for the vast majority of people.

If you are pregnant or have a weakened immune system and have NOT had chickenpox and you are exposed to chickenpox or shingles, you should contact your midwife or GP immediately for advice.

## **Useful links**

Further advice and information is available from:

- NHS 24: Freephone 111 or [www.nhs24.scot](http://www.nhs24.scot)
- NHS Inform: [www.nhsinform.scot](http://www.nhsinform.scot)

## **We are listening – how did we do?**

We welcome your feedback, as it helps us evaluate the services we provide. If you would like to tell us about your experience:

- speak to a member of staff
- visit our website feedback section at: [www.wihb.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.wihb.scot.nhs.uk) or share your story at: [www.careopinion.org.uk](http://www.careopinion.org.uk) or tel. 0800 122 31 35
- tel. 01851 708069 Monday-Friday between 9am-5.30pm.

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