

## Useful links

NHS 24

Freephone 111  
[www.nhs24.scot](http://www.nhs24.scot)

NHSinform

[www.nhsinform.scot](http://www.nhsinform.scot)

## Further information and help

For further information please contact:

NHS Western Isles Public Health Team  
Email: [wi.healthprotection@nhs.scot](mailto:wi.healthprotection@nhs.scot)  
Tel. 01870 603366 / 01851 708033



Bòrd SSN nan Eilean Siar  
NHS Western Isles

Health Protection Team

## 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 704704 (ext 2236) Monday-Friday between 10am-4pm.



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### Disclaimer

The content of this leaflet is intended to augment, not replace, information provided by your clinician. It is not intended nor implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice. Reading this information does not create or replace a doctor-patient relationship or consultation. If required, please contact your doctor or other health care provider to assist you to interpret any of this information, or in applying the information to your individual needs.

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## Shingles (Varicella zoster virus)



Patient information leaflet

## Signs and symptoms

Typically appearing as pain, itching or tingling in the affected skin and can be anywhere in the body, but usually located 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, which then 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

Anti-viral treatment is available on prescription and is very effective in reducing the intensity of pain and duration of shingles. If you think you might be getting shingles, contact your GP for assessment.

## 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.
- simple analgesia like paracetamol can be used for pain management, while cool compresses and loose clothing are helpful to avoid irritation.

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.

## Shingles vaccine

A shingles vaccine is available on the NHS for people who turned 65 on or after 1 September 2023, people aged 70 to 79 who have not yet been vaccinated and people aged 50 and over with a severely weakened immune system.

The vaccine helps reduce your risk of getting shingles.

Ask your GP surgery if you can get the vaccine on the NHS.