Shingles (Herpes Zoster)



What Is Shingles?

Herpes zoster is often known as shingles. It is a painful skin rash caused by the same virus that causes chicken pox. Anyone who has had chicken pox can get shingles.

Shingles is most common in people:

- 50 years of age and older
- Who have a serious medical condition
- Who take a medicine that makes it harder to fight infection





What Are the Warning Signs of Shingles?

- Painful, itchy, tingling skin.
- Rash with blisters on one side of the body, usually on the upper back and chest and lower back and abdomen (stomach).
- A painful condition can last for a long time after the rash heals. This condition causes severe burning or sharp pain or itchiness in the area where the shingles rash appeared.
- Depending where the rash is on the body, other serious complications of shingles may include vision loss, ear pain, weakness in the legs and arms, and back pain.



How Is Shingles Diagnosed?

- Your doctor will diagnose shingles after giving a physical exam and reviewing your symptoms.
- Sometimes blood tests are needed to confirm the diagnosis.



How Is Shingles Treated?

- You may be prescribed antiviral medicine to help the rash heal and reduce pain.
- Early treatment (within 3 days after symptoms begin) may reduce the risk for complications, such as ongoing pain and itching.
- Other medicines may include antihistamines to reduce itching and pain relievers to help with pain.



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Questions for My Doctor

- How do I know if I have shingles?
- How does this differ from other kinds of herpes?
- Is shingles contagious?
- How long will it take to go away?
- What is the best way to prevent shingles?
- Should I get the shingles vaccine?
- How can I manage the pain and itching?
- Do I need to stop any of my activities?
- How did I get shingles?



Bottom Line

- Herpes zoster is often known as shingles. It is a painful, itchy, blistering skin rash caused by the same virus that causes the chicken pox. The rash usually affects a small area on one side of the body on the chest or abdomen (stomach).
- Shingles can cause burning, pain, or itchiness long after the rash goes away.
- Your doctor will diagnose shingles after giving you a physical exam and talking to you about your symptoms. A blood test may be ordered to confirm the diagnosis.
- Treatment may include medicine to help heal the rash and reduce pain and itching.
 To be effective, treatment must be started early, usually within 3 days from the start of symptoms.

For More Information

- MedlinePlus: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/shingles.html
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/shingles/default.htm
- National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke: www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/shingles/shingles.htm
- National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases: www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/shingles/Pages/Default.aspx

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