



## Shingles (*Herpes zoster*)

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Runnymede Healthcare Centre receives funding from the Toronto Central Local Health Integration Network. The opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent the views of the Toronto Central Local Health Integration Network.

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# Shingles

## (*Herpes zoster*)

### WHAT IS SHINGLES?

SHINGLES (*HERPES ZOSTER*) is an acute, painful inflammation of a nerve that is accompanied by an eruption of blisters on the skin.

It is caused by the same virus as chickenpox.

### IS SHINGLES CONTAGIOUS?

Shingles is contagious to anyone who has not had chickenpox or the varicella vaccines.

They become at risk for infection by touching the open blisters of a person who has shingles, or items that are contaminated with the virus, and then touching their own mouth, nose or eyes.

Instead of developing shingles, though, these people would develop chickenpox.

### WHO IS AT RISK FOR DEVELOPING SHINGLES?

Anyone who has had chickenpox is at risk of developing shingles. After a

person recovers from chickenpox, the virus stays in the body in an inactive state, but can reactivate years later, causing shingles.

People who are run down due to stress, illness, shock or are receiving medical treatment are more likely to develop shingles.

The older an individual is, the greater their risk of developing shingles.

### WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

The symptoms for shingles include:

- Skin that feels itchy, tingles or burns
- Fever
- Blister-like rash that appears within two to three days
- New blisters that continue to form on the skin for up to a week

### HOW IS SHINGLES TREATED?

There are medications available for shingles; consult a physician for more information.

- Try to avoid touching or scratching the rash
- Avoid contact with others to prevent the spread of the infection
- Wear loose-fitting clothes to minimize skin irritation and prevent rubbing

- Apply ice packs or take cool baths to minimize itching or burning sensation
- Anti-itching lotions, like calamine, can also be applied to the skin
- Make sure to eat sensibly and rest

### POSTHERPETIC NEURALGIA (PHN)

As the rash heals, pain may persist. The pain is called postherpetic neuralgia (PHN) and can be debilitating in individuals over 60 years old.

The symptoms for PHN include:

- Fatigue
- Disrupted sleep
- Depression and social withdrawal
- Decreased hearing
- Skin infections and scarring

### HOW CAN SHINGLES AND PHN BE PREVENTED?

To prevent shingles and PHN, the Centre for Disease Control (CDC) and Canadian immunization guide recommend a shingles vaccine for adults who are 50 years of age or older.