

# Facts & DETAILS

## Shingles

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### What is shingles?

Shingles is an illness caused by the varicella zoster virus, the same virus that causes chickenpox. Shingles is also known as zoster or herpes zoster; it is not caused by the same virus that causes genital herpes, a sexually transmitted infection.

### How common is shingles?

Almost one out of every three people in the United States will develop shingles.

### How do people become infected?

Only people who have had chickenpox can get shingles. After a person recovers from chickenpox, the virus stays in the body and can reappear many years later to cause shingles.

### What are the signs and symptoms of shingles?

Shingles is a painful skin rash, often with blisters. Before the rash develops, pain, itching, or tingling may occur in the area where the rash will develop. The rash usually occurs on one side of the face or body and lasts from two to four weeks. Besides pain, shingles can cause fever, headache, chills, and an upset stomach. Shingles complications include pain in the rash areas (postherpetic neuralgia) and eye complications. Rarely, pneumonia, hearing problems, blindness, brain inflammation, or death can occur.

### How long can a person spread shingles?

You can't catch shingles from another person. Although uncommon, a person who has never had chickenpox could get chickenpox from a person with shingles.

### Who is at risk for shingles?

Anyone who has had chickenpox can get shingles, but your risk of infection increases as you get older. About half of all cases occur in people 60 years old and older.

### How is shingles treated?

Several antiviral medications are available to shorten the length and severity of shingles. The medicines include acyclovir, valacyclovir, and famciclovir. To be effective, the medicine must be started as soon as possible after the rash appears. Pain medicine may help relieve the pain caused by shingles. Wet compresses, calamine lotion, and colloidal oatmeal baths may help relieve some of the itching.

### How can you prevent shingles?

The best way to prevent shingles is to be vaccinated. The shingles vaccine is recommended for persons aged 50 years and older. Even people who have had shingles should receive the vaccine to help prevent future occurrences of the disease.

In 2018, a new shingles vaccine, Shingrix, was approved in the United States. Shingrix is the preferred vaccine over Zostavax. You should get the Shingrix vaccine even if you have had shingles or had the Zostavax vaccine previously.

For More Information:  
Sedgwick County Division of Health  
Epidemiology Program  
1900 E. 9th St.  
Wichita, KS 67214  
(316) 660-7300  
[www.sedgwickcounty.org](http://www.sedgwickcounty.org)



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