



# FACTS

## About...



HEALTH DEPARTMENT



# Shingles

## What is it?

Shingles (herpes-zoster) is a painful rash caused by a virus. This is the same virus that causes chickenpox. Shingles can only occur in people who have been exposed to or infected with chickenpox in the past. The virus stays in the body and may cause shingles later in life. Most people who have shingles have only one episode of the disease in their lifetime. Shingles can affect people of all ages but occurs more often in adults over the age of 50. It is also more common in people with conditions that weaken the immune system.

## How is it spread?

Shingles in one person cannot cause shingles in another person. Contact with someone who has shingles may cause chickenpox in another person who has not had chickenpox before. It is spread from person to person by direct contact with fluid filled blisters, and indirectly by articles freshly soiled by discharge from blisters.

## What do I look for?

The first signs of shingles are often pain, itching or tingling in the area where a rash will develop, followed by a rash that appears as a band or patch of raised bumps on one side of the body. The rash then develops into small, fluid-filled blisters, which contain the virus and are contagious.

## How is it treated?

Shingles usually clears on its own within a few weeks. If required, shingles can be treated with an anti-viral medication prescribed by a health care provider. Medication can improve healing time and reduce the number of new blisters, pain, and the length of time that blisters are contagious. It may also help reduce pain that remains after the rash disappears. Other medications, such as over-the-counter pain relievers may also be recommended by a health care provider.

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**For more information**

**Durham Region Health Department**

**905-666-6241 1-800-841-2729 durham.ca**

**If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 1-800-841-2729.**



## How can I protect myself?

- Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water or use hand sanitizer when hands are not visibly dirty.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water before and after touching the affected area.
- Staying healthy (i.e. eat healthy, exercise, get enough rest and sleep), may decrease your chance of getting shingles.
- If you have shingles, keep blisters clean and covered to keep the virus from spreading to others.
- If fluid in the blisters becomes cloudy and the skin around the blisters becomes red, hot, or swollen, this may be a sign of infection. If this happens, you should see a health care provider.
- If the blisters are on your face, especially the tip of your nose, around your eye, or in your ear you should see a health care provider.
- Ask your health care provider about shingles vaccine.
- See Facts About... Shingles Vaccine.

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