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FACT SHEET

Shingles

Shingles, also known as zoster or herpes zoster, is a painful skin rash. It is caused by the varicella zoster virus (VZV); the same virus that causes chickenpox. Nearly 1 out of every 3 people in the United States will develop shingles in their lifetime. Anyone who has had chickenpox or received chickenpox vaccine in the past may develop shingles. Even children can get shingles. The risk of developing the disease increases as you get older. <http://www.cdc.gov/shingles/index.html>

Cause: The same virus that causes chickenpox, varicella zoster virus (VZV). Once you've had chickenpox the virus remains dormant in the body therefore, anyone who has had chickenpox can get shingles. Those at greatest risk of reactivation are people who are 60 years and older, those who are immune compromised, those who were exposed during fetal development in the womb and those who've had chickenpox illness before 18 months of age.

Symptoms: The most common symptom is a painful rash on one side of the body or on the face. The rash forms blisters that typically scab over in 7 to 10 days and clears up within 2 to 4 weeks. One to five days prior to the rash people often have pain, itching, or tingling in the area where the rash will develop. Other less common symptoms include: fever, headache, chills and upset stomach. Once the rash clears, pain often remains in that area for months or years.

Spread: The virus is spread through direct contact with fluid from the rash blisters caused by shingles. Shingles cannot be passed to from person to person but the virus that causes shingles can be passed to another person if the exposed person has never had chickenpox. Then the exposed individual could develop chickenpox rather than shingles. You can get shingles more than once.

Incubation: Persons exposed to shingles who have never been vaccinated for chickenpox or shingles should be monitored from day 8 until day 21 after being exposed. Healthcare providers visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/shingles/hcp/hc-settings.html>

Contagious Period: A person who has shingles illness can spread the virus when the rash is in the blister-phase. A person is not infectious before the blisters appear. Once the rash has developed crusts, the person is no longer contagious. Shingles is less contagious than chickenpox and the risk of a person with shingles spreading the virus is low if the rash is covered.

Precautions: those who have medical conditions that keep their immune systems from working properly, such as certain cancers like leukemia and lymphoma, and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and receiving immunosuppressive therapy.

Diagnosis and Treatment: Often times signs and symptoms direct the healthcare provider in diagnosing shingles but in less obvious presentations other tests for shingles include skin scrapings, tissue sampling and blood tests.

Prevention: Getting a one-time dose of the shingles vaccine reduces the risk of becoming ill with shingles. Anyone 60 years or older should visit with their healthcare provider about getting the shingles vaccine.