# Shingles

## What is Shingles?

Shingles is a very painful condition caused by the virus varicella zoster. This virus first infected you as Chicken Pox (probably when you were a child).

Shingles is a reactivation of the viral infection and can occur anywhere on the body. This reactivation is similar to that which occurs with cold sores.

Most individuals who develop Shingles are older than 50 years, and may have other chronic medical problems or take medications which suppress their immune system such as prednisone.

Young healthy people can get Shingles when they are run down sufficiently to affect their immune system and is not uncommon in shift workers who get inadequate sleep and rest.



Image source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Herpes_zoster_chest.png

## How does Shingles affect me?

- A mild sensation is often the first symptom which evolves into a tingling-type pain. This occurs before the rash appears.
- A rash on one side of the body or face.
- Blisters develop in the rash site and then crust over.
- Fever, headache, fatigue, and chills may also occur.

## What is the treatment?

- Antiviral medications - if taken soon after symptoms begin (i.e. <3 days), these can shorten the length of time a Shingles episode lasts and the severity of symptoms.
- Rest and maintaining a normal diet, to support your immune system.
- Analgesia as suggested in the ECI Pain Management Factsheet.
- Cover blisters until they are crusted over. Do not scratch blisters, since they can then become infected.
- Wash hands frequently.
- Avoid close contact with pregnant women and small babies.
- Shingles on the face and around the eye can affect the eye adversely and you will need specialist care for this.
- Shingles will rarely be a part of or cause critical illness.

## Can this be prevented?

Vaccines are available for Chicken Pox and for Shingles. The varicella vaccine (for Chicken Pox) is recommended for children and for adults who have not already had Chicken Pox.

The Shingles vaccine is recommended for adults who are older than 60 years. Certain individuals should not have these vaccines including pregnant women, persons with immune system disease, and infants younger than 12 months of age.

## Am I contagious?

If you have Shingles you can pass on the virus to people who have not had Chicken Pox. You should therefore avoid pregnant women and unvaccinated babies.

People with open wounds should avoid contact with the rash area.

Once the blisters have healed, the contagious phase is finished.

## Are there any long lasting effects?

Some individuals develop a long-lasting pain condition called Postherpetic Neuralgia after having Shingles.

Postherpetic Neuralgia is more common in older people. Early treatment of Shingles with an antiviral medication and good adequate pain killers may help prevent the development of Postherpetic Neuralgia.