

# Shingles

## Fact Sheet



Maine Center for Disease  
Control and Prevention

An Office of the  
Department of Health and Human Services

Paul R. LePage, Governor

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### What is Shingles?

It is a painful skin rash caused by the varicella zoster virus, the same virus that causes chickenpox.

### Who can get it?

Anyone who had chickenpox or received the chickenpox vaccine in the past may develop shingles.

### What are the symptoms?

Shingles is a painful rash on one side of the face or body. The rash forms blisters that typically scab over in 7 to 10 days. Most commonly, the rash occurs in a single stripe around either the left or right side of the body. Other symptoms can include: fever, headache, chills, and upset stomach.

### Are there complications?

The most common complication of shingles is a condition called post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN). People with PHN have severe pain in the area where they had the shingles rash, even after the rash clears up. Shingles may also lead to complications involving the eye, and rarely lead to pneumonia, hearing problems, blindness, swelling of the brain, or death.

### How is shingles spread?

Shingles cannot be passed from one person to another. However, the virus can be spread from a person with active shingles to someone who has never had chickenpox. The person exposed to the virus might develop chickenpox, but they would not develop shingles.

### How long is an infected person able to spread the disease?

The virus is spread through direct contact with draining lesions only when the rash is in the blister phase. The person is not infectious

before the blisters appear or after the rash crusts.

### What is the treatment for shingles?

Several drugs are available to treat shingles, but must be started as soon as possible after the rash appears.

### How do I protect myself and my family?

The only way to reduce the risk of developing shingles is to get vaccinated. CDC recommends that people 60 years and older get one dose of shingles vaccine.

Family and contacts of shingles cases that are not immune to chickenpox should get vaccinated with the varicella vaccine.

### Where can I get more information?

Your healthcare provider or local health center will have additional information. You can also contact Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention by calling 1-800-821-5821 or visiting the website <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/vaccine/varicella.shtml>. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website <http://www.cdc.gov/shingles> is another excellent source of health information.