

# “I have a lot of questions about shingles. What can you tell me about it?”

**Although anyone can develop shingles, most people who get shingles will recover and will not get it again.**

Shingles is a painful skin rash. It is caused by a virus. Shingles usually appears in a band, a strip, or a small area on one side of the face or body. Shingles is most common in older adults and people who have weak immune systems.

## What causes shingles?

Shingles occurs when the virus that causes chickenpox reactivates in your body. After you recover from chickenpox, the virus “sleeps” (is dormant) in your nerve roots. In some people, it stays dormant forever. In others, the virus is triggered when disease, stress, or aging weakens the immune system. Medicines can also awaken the virus and cause a shingles rash. It is not clear why this happens. But after the virus emerges, it can only cause shingles, not chickenpox.

You can’t catch shingles from someone else. But there is a small chance that a person with a shingles rash can spread the virus to another person who hasn’t had chickenpox or the chickenpox vaccine. That person can contract chicken pox from the virus, but not shingles.

## What are the symptoms?

Shingles symptoms happen in stages. At first you may have a headache or be sensitive to light. You may also experience fever, chills, upset stomach, joint pain or swollen glands.

Later, you may feel itching, tingling, or pain in a certain area. That’s where a band, strip, or small area of rash may occur a few days later. The rash turns into clusters of blisters. The blisters fill with fluid and then crust over. It takes two to four weeks for the blisters to heal. Some people only get a mild rash. And some do not get a rash at all.

It’s possible that you could also feel dizzy or weak. Or you could have long-term pain, a rash on your face, changes in your vision, changes in how well you can think, or a rash that spreads.

## How is shingles treated?

Shingles is treated with antiviral and pain medications. Either prescription or over-the-counter medications can help your rash heal faster and be less painful. So if you think you may have shingles, see your doctor right away. Early treatment is important.

Good home care also can help you feel better faster. Take care of any skin sores and keep them clean. Take your medications as directed.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that people aged 60 years and older get one dose of the shingles vaccine. The shingles vaccine is available in pharmacies and doctors’ offices. Talk with your healthcare professional if you have questions about the shingles vaccine.

