

SHINGLES (ZOSTER)

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After a person has chickenpox, the virus that causes it can remain inactive in the body for many years. Shingles occurs when the virus becomes active again, usually in older adults. When women get chickenpox while pregnant, their babies sometimes develop shingles during infancy. Also, if children get chickenpox before the age of one, they may develop shingles during childhood. Shingles is a milder illness in children than in adults; but it can be a serious illness in those who have weakened immunity.

CAUSE: *Varicella-zoster* virus, a member of the herpesvirus family

SYMPTOMS: Severe pain and numbness along certain nerve pathways, commonly around the midline (trunk) or on the face. 10 to 14 days later, clusters of blisters appear in crops, usually on one side of the body and closer together than in chickenpox.

SPREAD: Shingles does not spread from one person to another. When people who have not had chickenpox are exposed to the fluid from shingles blisters, they can develop chickenpox.

INCUBATION: None.

CONTAGIOUS PERIOD: Until one week after the blisters appear.



If sores can be covered by clothing or a bandage, no exclusion is needed. If sores cannot be covered, the infected individual should be excluded until the sores crusted and dry.



1. When a pregnant woman or a person with a weak immune system, who has not had chickenpox, is exposed to shingles, he or she should contact a physician for possible treatment usually within six days.
2. **DO NOT GIVE ASPIRIN TO A CHILD WITH SHINGLES.** There is a risk of developing Reye syndrome (a serious condition which can cause death) when children take aspirin for viral illnesses such as chickenpox or influenza.



For more information, you or your physician may call the Douglas County Health Department at 444-7241 or your local health department.