

# Shingles (Herpes Zoster)



## What Is Shingles?

Herpes zoster is often known as shingles. It is a painful skin rash caused by the same virus that causes chicken pox. Anyone who has had chicken pox can get shingles.

Shingles is most common in people:

- 50 years of age and older
- Who have a serious medical condition
- Who take a medicine that makes it harder to fight infection



## What Are the Warning Signs of Shingles?

- Painful, itchy, tingling skin.
- Rash with blisters on one side of the body, usually on the upper back and chest and lower back and abdomen (stomach).
- A painful condition can last for a long time after the rash heals. This condition causes severe burning or sharp pain or itchiness in the area where the shingles rash appeared.
- Depending where the rash is on the body, other serious complications of shingles may include vision loss, ear pain, weakness in the legs and arms, and back pain.



## How Is Shingles Diagnosed?

- Your doctor will diagnose shingles after giving a physical exam and reviewing your symptoms.
- Sometimes blood tests are needed to confirm the diagnosis.



## How Is Shingles Treated?

- You may be prescribed antiviral medicine to help the rash heal and reduce pain.
- Early treatment (within 3 days after symptoms begin) may reduce the risk for complications, such as ongoing pain and itching.
- Other medicines may include antihistamines to reduce itching and pain relievers to help with pain.

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## Questions for My Doctor

- How do I know if I have shingles?
- How does this differ from other kinds of herpes?
- Is shingles contagious?
- How long will it take to go away?
- What is the best way to prevent shingles?
- Should I get the shingles vaccine?
- How can I manage the pain and itching?
- Do I need to stop any of my activities?
- How did I get shingles?



## Bottom Line

- Herpes zoster is often known as shingles. It is a painful, itchy, blistering skin rash caused by the same virus that causes the chicken pox. The rash usually affects a small area on one side of the body on the chest or abdomen (stomach).
- Shingles can cause burning, pain, or itchiness long after the rash goes away.
- Your doctor will diagnose shingles after giving you a physical exam and talking to you about your symptoms. A blood test may be ordered to confirm the diagnosis.
- Treatment may include medicine to help heal the rash and reduce pain and itching. To be effective, treatment must be started early, usually within 3 days from the start of symptoms.

## For More Information

- **MedlinePlus:**  
[www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/shingles.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/shingles.html)
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:**  
[www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/shingles/default.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/shingles/default.htm)
- **National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke:**  
[www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/shingles/shingles.htm](http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/shingles/shingles.htm)
- **National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases:**  
[www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/shingles/Pages/Default.aspx](http://www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/shingles/Pages/Default.aspx)

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