

DESCRIPTION

A condition that causes pain, a rash, and blisters on the skin. You can only get shingles if you have had chickenpox in the past. It can affect all ages, including children, but is most common in adults over age 50.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- It starts with pain, tingling, or burning on the skin.
- Mild chills and fever.
- General ill feeling.
- Mild nausea, stomach ache, cramps, or diarrhea.
- Chest pain, face pain, or burning pain in the skin of stomach, depending on the affected area.
- A rash appears a few days after the first symptoms begin. It appears as a band of reddened skin on one side of the chest, neck, back, or face. The rash turns into fluid-filled blisters. These may itch or be very painful. The blisters then begin to dry out and crust over in several days.

CAUSES

Shingles is caused by the varicella-zoster virus, the same virus that causes chickenpox. After a chickenpox infection, the virus remains inactive in nerve cells in the body. In some people, the virus becomes active again and causes shingles. Why this happens is not entirely known.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Anyone who has had chickenpox.
- Adults over age 50.
- Cancer.
- High stress situations.
- People who have a weak immune system due to drugs or illness.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

The shingles vaccine Zostavax® has been shown to reduce the risk of developing shingles by 50%. It has been approved by the FDA for men and women over the age of 50. The CDC recommends that appropriate individuals receive a single dose of the vaccine. Individuals with certain allergies and conditions should not receive Zostavax®.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Skin infection may occur in the herpes zoster blisters.
- Muscle weakness.
- When blisters are present, herpes zoster patients can spread the virus and cause chickenpox in people who have never had it. Avoid physical contact with pregnant women, infants, and those with weak immune systems.
- Chronic pain, especially in the elderly. It lasts for months or years in the nerves where the blisters have been. This is called post-herpetic neuralgia.
- Spread of zoster over the body or to internal organs.
- If the face is affected, eye complications and hearing loss can occur.

GENERAL MEASURES

- The rash usually clears in 14 to 21 days. One attack usually provides immunity against herpes zoster, but a few persons have had more than one attack.
- Your health care provider can usually diagnose the disorder by a skin exam of the affected area and asking questions about your pain symptoms. If the rash has not appeared, it is more difficult to diagnose. Lab tests may be done to confirm the diagnosis.
- Goals of treatment are to relieve the itching and the pain as much as possible. This is usually done with topical and oral medications. The nerve pain that remains after the skin clears up is the most difficult to treat.

FOR SELF-CARE:

- When bathing, wash blisters gently.
- Try applying cool, moist compresses to help decrease the pain.
- Soak in a tub of water to which cornstarch or an oatmeal product (such as Aveeno®) has been added.

MEDICATIONS

- Use calamine lotion, Domeboro® soaks or Benadryl® Cream for the blisters. For minor pain and discomfort, you may use medications such as acetaminophen and ibuprofen.
 - You may be prescribed one or more medicines to help treat the symptoms. Antiviral medications are most effective in patients over 50 and can help if the disorder is diagnosed early.
 - Other medications for pain may be prescribed. Different ones may need to be tried, as they are not always effective for every person.
 - Oral steroids may also be prescribed to reduce inflammation.
- ↳ Unless your doctor tells you differently, always finish the full course of your steroid prescription, even if you start to feel better.
- ↳ Steroids may interfere with the effectiveness of birth control pills. Use an alternative method of contraception for the remainder of the month after finishing your antibiotic and/or steroid prescription.

SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IF

- Pain gets worse, despite treatment.
- Lesions appear on the tip of the nose.
- You develop eye related symptoms.
- New symptoms develop. Medications may have side effects.