PUBLIC FACT SHEET

Ottawa County Health Department

SHINGLES

What is shingles?

Shingles is a painful, blister-like rash caused by the varicella zoster (chickenpox) virus. A person cannot develop shingles without having had chickenpox.

How is shingles spread?

Shingles can not be spread from person to person.

What are possible symptoms?

Symptoms appear as follows:

- The first sign is usually a tingling feeling, itchiness or stabbing pain on the skin.
- The rash appears 2-3 days later. The rash is red and raised with clear centers that look like chickenpox.
- The rash may spread over the next 3-5 days.
- Gradually, the blisters break open and then begin to scab over.
- The scabs fall off in 2-3 weeks.
- Occasionally there may be pain that lasts for months to years after the initial episode. The elderly are more at risk for this complication.

How is shingles diagnosed?

A doctor can often diagnose shingles based on what the rash looks like. Occasionally, a culture of the rash is done.

What is the treatment for shingles?

- Shingles usually resolves on its own and does not require treatment.
- Medication may be given to shorten the course of the disease.
- A doctor may also prescribe medication for pain relief.

Can you get chickenpox from shingles?

If a person has never had chickenpox and is exposed to the fluid from the shingles blister, it is possible for that person to develop chickenpox.

For more information on shingles:

Ottawa County Health Department
www.miOttawa.org
Medline Plus/National Institutes of Health
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000858.htm
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/list_varicl.htm

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