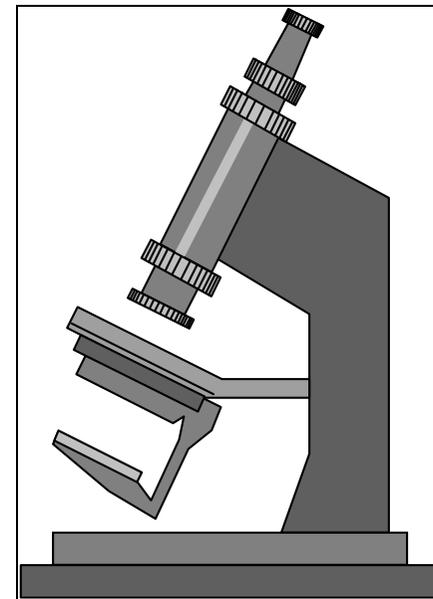


If you require more information about **Shingles** please contact:



*The Community Infection Prevention & Control Nurse*  
or  
*your local Health Protection Unit*  
or  
<http://www.hpa.org.uk/topics>

# HPA North West



Information produced in collaboration with:  
The Health Protection Agency North West,  
North West Infection Prevention & Control Nurses  
and  
North West Environmental Health Officers.

## Shingles (Herpes Zoster)

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INFORMATION LEAFLET

## What is Shingles? (*Herpes Zoster*)

Shingles is an infection caused by the reactivation of the Varicella Zoster virus - the virus which causes chickenpox.

When a person has chickenpox the virus remains dormant in their body. This virus can reactivate if the immune system is weakened.

A person can have shingles more than once.

## What are the symptoms?

Shingles causes:

- A painful itchy rash with blister-like spots which contain fluid.
- The rash occurs along the nerve pathways of the trunk, the face and around the eyes.
- Sometimes the pain will persist for some time, even after the shingles infection has cleared up.

## Who does it affect?

Mainly adults, particularly those over the age of 40 years, but shingles can affect anyone who has previously had chickenpox.

## Can it be passed on?

You cannot 'catch' shingles, it is **always** caused by the reactivation of the virus that previously caused a person to have chickenpox.

It is possible though to develop a chickenpox infection from close contact with someone who has shingles if you **have not previously had chickenpox**, through direct contact with:

- The fluid contained in the blister-like spots of the rash
- Items recently contaminated by this fluid, for example, towels and bed linen.

## Do you need any treatment?

**YES** - most people with shingles will require 'pain-killers' as the rash can cause severe pain. Sometimes your doctor may prescribe other types of medication that may be more helpful in relieving the severe pain and discomfort.

Anti-viral treatment can be given but the treatment must be started early (within 72 hours of the onset of the shingles) if it is to be effective.

Sometimes the rash may get infected (e.g. from scratching), if this happens consult your doctor.

Occasionally, shingles may affect a person's eyes. If this occurs your doctor may refer you to an eye specialist.

## Can you go to work or school?

If the shingles rash is only on your body **and** will be completely covered by clothing, then the risk to other people who have no natural immunity to chickenpox will be greatly reduced, so you will be able to return to work/school if you feel well enough.

If the rash is on an area of the body that **cannot be covered** (e.g. the face or around the eyes) then you should stay off of work/school until the rash is completely dry and the vesicles have crusted over.