



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

Oahu 586-4586, Maui 984-8213, Hilo 933-0912,

Kona 322-4877, Kauai 241-3563

Shingles

(Herpes Zoster)

What is shingles?

Shingles is a disease of the skin produced by the same virus that causes chickenpox, herpes zoster virus (VZV). VZV remains in the nerve roots of all people who have had chickenpox, and can become reactivated and cause illness years after the original chickenpox infection. Why the virus reactivates is unknown.

How do you get it?

After having chickenpox, VZV lies dormant in the nerves, and shingles occurs when it is reactivated in one nerve. Usually the cause is a decrease in your body's natural resistance, through other infections, stress, or when the body's immune defenses are affected by drugs or disease.

What are the symptoms of shingles?

A first sign of shingles is often a tingling sensation on the skin accompanied by itching or intense stabbing pain. After several days, a patchy rash appears as raised dots, which quickly turn into blisters. The blisters burst and crust over within about a week. The pain may sometimes continue once the rash is gone. Although shingles is often very painful, the disease is not considered dangerous to healthy individuals. However, anyone experiencing shingles attack close to eyes should promptly seek the medical attention of an eye doctor.

Is a person with shingles contagious?

People with shingles are contagious to people who have not had chickenpox. However, you cannot catch shingles from someone else. You get shingles from the VZV in your own body, not from someone else. If you have shingles, you should stay away from other people until the blisters have dried, to protect people who have not had chickenpox.

What is the treatment for shingles?

Most persons with shingles get better on their own without treatment. Sometimes, medicines prescribed by a physician may shorten the duration and lessen the severity of the illness.

If you get shingles once, can you get it again?

Since shingles is caused by a reactivation of VZV in the nerves of people who have previously had chickenpox, shingles can occur more than once. These attacks may affect a different part of the body.

Can someone who has been vaccinated against chickenpox get shingles?

Yes. However people who receive the chickenpox are less likely to develop shingles than people who had chickenpox disease.

For more information, see the CDC's website at <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/shingles/dis-faqs.htm>