

ALLEGAN COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

3255 – 122ND Ave., Suite 200, Allegan, MI 49010

Office Administration

(269) 673-5411

Bioterrorism Preparedness

(269) 673-5411

Personal Health

(269) 673-5411



Communicable Disease

(269) 673-5411

Environmental Health

(269) 673-5415

Resource Recovery

(269) 673-5415

Shingles

What is shingles?

Shingles (herpes zoster) is a painful skin rash caused by reactivation of the varicella zoster virus that causes chickenpox. It occurs only in people who have had chickenpox in the past and represents a reactivation of the dormant virus. The disease is primarily seen in persons with weakened immune systems, such as the elderly and those with certain underlying medical conditions.

What are the symptoms of shingles?

The first symptom is often a tingling feeling on the skin, itchiness or a stabbing pain. After several days, a rash appears as a band or patch of raised dots on the side of the trunk or face. It then develops into small, fluid-filled blisters that dry out and crust over within a few days. When the rash is at its peak, symptoms can range from mild itching to severe pain. The rash and pain usually disappear within three to five weeks.

How is shingles spread?

A person with shingles cannot give shingles to another person. However, the virus that causes shingles can be spread to someone that has not had chickenpox, causing them to get chickenpox. Spread occurs by direct contact with fluid from blisters of a person with shingles.

When and for how long is a person able to spread shingles?

The virus is present at the site of the rash and is contagious for a week after the appearance of lesions (blisters) and until blisters become dry and crusted.

Does past infection make a person immune?

Most people who have shingles have only one episode of the disease in their lifetime although some may have recurrent episodes. Those with impaired immune systems (e.g., people with AIDS, cancer or leukemia) may suffer repeated attacks.

What is the treatment for shingles?

Most cases of shingles resolve on their own without specific treatment. Physicians can prescribe medication for pain management and antiviral medications can be used in cases of individuals with a weakened immune system.

What can be done to prevent the spread of shingles?

Chickenpox must be prevented in order to prevent shingles. Receiving chickenpox vaccine may reduce the risk of developing shingles later in life. Vaccine for shingles is also available to those over 50 years of age and can help reduce the occurrence and severity of outbreaks.

More information is available at www.cdc.gov

This fact sheet is not intended to replace the advice of your physician. Please contact your healthcare provider if they have concerns regarding their child's health. If you have general questions, you may contact an Allegan County Public Health Nurse at 269-673-5411.