



## **Shingles (Herpes Zoster)**

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### **What is it?**

- An infection caused by a herpes virus. The same virus causes chickenpox.
- Anyone who has had chickenpox can develop shingles.
- The virus remains sleeping in certain nerve cells of the body for months/years and then awakens.
- Occurs more commonly in older people and persons unable to fight disease normally; e.g. those with cancer.

### **What are the symptoms?**

- A burning pain or tingling and extreme sensitivity in one area of the skin.
- Within 1 – 3 days a red rash appears (in crops).
- The rashes becomes blister-like, lasting 2 – 5 weeks, during which time pus may develop and sores crust over and begin to disappear.
- Pain may last longer.
- Blisters commonly appear on the trunk, including the buttock area. They can affect other areas as well.

### **How quickly do symptoms develop?**

- Exposed persons are at risk of developing chickenpox, not shingles, within 2 – 3 weeks.

### **How is it spread?**

- By direct contact with fluid from the blisters of someone with shingles.

### **How long is it contagious?**

- For 7 days after the appearance of the blisters.

### **How is it treated?**

- Shingles usually clear up on their own and seldom recur.
- If needed, treatment may include pain relievers, cool-compresses, anti-viral medication and ointments.

### **What can you do?**

- If symptoms develop, contact your physician for diagnosis and treatment.
- While contagious, avoid contact with newborns, pregnant women, and persons with weak immune systems; e.g. illnesses such as cancer, HIV.
- Zostavax vaccine is available for the prevention of shingles for individuals 50 years of age or older.

### **Whom should I talk to if I have any questions?**

Communicable Disease Control, Algoma Public Health at (705) 942-4646,  
[www.algomapublichealth.com](http://www.algomapublichealth.com) or your health care provider.