



Shingles (Herpes Zoster)

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 or your health care provider.