

**98% of adults in the United States have been infected with the chickenpox virus, and are at risk for Shingles**

Did you know that Shingles can only occur in people who have had chickenpox? After you've had chickenpox, the virus lies inactive in nerve tissue near your spinal cord and brain. Years later, the virus may reactivate. In some people it remains dormant forever, yet in others it attacks again. This second episode of chickenpox virus infection is called Shingles.

**Q: What are the symptoms?**

**A:** The first sign of Shingles is often burning or tingling pain, or itch, in one particular location on only one side of the body. After several days or a week, a rash of fluid-filled blisters, similar to chickenpox, appears in one area on one side of the body. Other symptoms of Shingles may include fever, headache, chills, and upset stomach.

**Q: Can Shingles be passed on to others?**

**A:** Actually, yes. A person with a Shingles rash can pass the virus to someone who has never had chickenpox if it enters their respiratory system or gets on their mucous membranes. The person will develop chickenpox, not Shingles. The person must come into direct contact with the open sores of the Shingles rash during the blistering phase. However, once the rash has developed crusts, the person is no longer contagious.

**Q: How do you know when to see a doctor?**

**A:** Contact your doctor promptly if you suspect Shingles, but especially in the following situations:

- The pain and rash occur near an eye. If left untreated, this infection can lead to permanent eye damage.
- You're 50 or older, which increases your risk of complications, such as pain after the rash is healed..
- You or someone in your family has a weakened immune system (due to cancer, medications or chronic illness).
- The rash is widespread and painful.

**Q: What is the treatment for Shingles?**

**A:** Starting antiviral medicine in the first few days can help your rash heal faster and be less painful. So if you think you may have shingles, see your doctor right away. Also, good home care can help you feel better faster. Take care of any skin sores, and keep them clean. Take your medicines as directed.

**Q: Can anything be done to prevent Shingles?**

**A:** Two vaccines may help prevent Shingles — the chickenpox (varicella) vaccine and the Shingles (varicella-zoster) vaccine. However, the vaccines are used only as a prevention strategy and are not intended to treat people who currently have the disease.

**Q: Who is at risk?**

**A:** While anyone who's had Chicken Pox is at risk, the older you get – the higher your risk. This is because your body can't defend itself against the virus that causes Shingles as well as it could when you were younger.

**Q: What are the possible complications?**

**A:** For most people, the pain from Shingles lessens as the rash heals — but for some people, Shingles can lead to more serious health problems such as scarring, bacterial skin infections, decrease or loss of vision or hearing, paralysis on one side of the face, muscle weakness, or long-term nerve pain.

While Shingles isn't a life-threatening condition, it can be very painful. Early treatment can help shorten a Shingles infection and lessen the chance of complications. If you think you may have Shingles, call Dermatology Associates of the Lowcountry (843) 689-5259 (Hilton Head) or (843) 705-0840 (Bluffton / Okatie) to schedule an appointment.