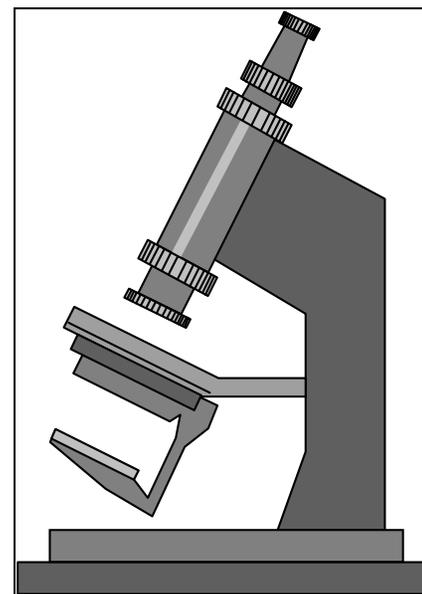


If you require more information about **Shingles** please contact:

*The Community Infection Control Nurse at your  
local Primary Care Trust (PCT)  
or your local Health Protection Unit*

# HPA North West



## **Shingles** (Herpes Zoster)

Information produced by: Health Protection Agency North West

The Health Protection Agency is a new independent organisation dedicated to protecting people's health. It brings together the expertise formerly in a number of local health protection organisations.

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Website: <http://www.hpa-nw.org.uk/>

## FORMATION LEAFLET

### What is Shingles? (*Herpes Zoster*)

Shingles is an infection caused by the reactivation of a virus called the Varicella Zoster Virus - the virus which causes chickenpox.

When a person has chickenpox the virus can remain inactive in their body. Later in life, if the immune system is weakened (eg. by illness or age), this virus can reactivate. A person can have shingles more than once.

Shingles causes:

A rash - with blister-like spots which contain fluid (called vesicles)

The rash usually follows the area where there are nerve pathways - the trunk, the face and around the eyes are often affected.

Pain - because the rash follows the nerve pathways it can cause severe pain. Sometimes this pain will persist for some time, even after the shingles infection has cleared up.

### Who does it affect?

Mainly adults, particularly those over the age of 40 years, but shingles can affect anyone who has previously had chickenpox.

### Can it be passed on?

You cannot 'catch' shingles, it is always caused by the reactivation of the virus which previously caused you to have chickenpox.

It is possible to develop a chickenpox infection from someone who has shingles if you have not previously had chickenpox, through direct contact with:

- The fluid contained in the blister-like spots of the rash
- items recently contaminated by this fluid, for example, towels and bed linen.

### Do you need any treatment?

YES, most people with shingles will require pain-killers as the rash can cause severe pain. Sometimes your doctor may prescribe other types of medication which may be more helpful in relieving the severe pain and discomfort.

Anti-viral treatment can be given but the treatment must be started early (within 72 hours of the onset of the shingles) if it is to be effective.

Sometimes the rash may get infected (e.g. from scratching), if this happens consult your doctor.

Occasionally, shingles may affect a person's eye (if the rash affects the area of the face around the eye) and the doctor may refer you to an eye specialist.

### Should you stay off Work or School?

People who have not had chickenpox can develop this from contact with shingles. This is especially a risk to those who are immunosuppressed.

If the rash is only on your body and will be completely covered by clothing, then the risk to other people who have no natural immunity to chickenpox will be greatly reduced, so you will be able to return to work/school if you feel well enough.

If the rash is on an area of the body which cannot be covered (eg. the face around the eyes) then you should stay off work/school until the rash is completely dry (the vesicles have crusted over).