

Shingles

Shingles is an infection that causes a painful rash.

If you think you have shingles, see a GP as soon as possible.

Check if you have shingles

Shingles is caused by the chickenpox virus.

The first signs of shingles can be a:

- tingling or painful feeling in an area of skin
- headache or feeling generally unwell

A rash will appear a few days later.

Usually you get shingles on your chest and tummy, but it can appear on your face, eyes and genitals.



The shingles rash appears as red blotches on your skin, on one side of your body only. A rash on both the left and right of your body is unlikely to be shingles.



The blotches become itchy blisters that ooze fluid. A few days later, the blisters dry out and scab.



The rash can form a band that only appears on one side of your body. The skin remains painful until after the rash has gone.



Shingles can also make your eyes red and sore, affect your sight or hearing, or make it difficult to move one side of your face.

See your GP

Your GP can prescribe medicine to help speed up your recovery and avoid longer-lasting problems.

These medicines work best if taken within 3 days of your symptoms starting.

⚠ Important

If you think you have shingles, see a GP as soon as possible.

How to treat shingles symptoms yourself

Do

- ✓ take paracetamol to ease the pain
- ✓ keep the rash clean and dry to reduce the risk of infection
- ✓ wear loose-fitting clothing
- ✓ use a cool compress (a bag of frozen vegetables wrapped in a towel or a wet cloth) a few times a day

Don't

- ✗ do not use antibiotic cream – this slows healing

How long shingles lasts

It can take up to 4 weeks for the rash to heal.

Your skin can be painful for weeks after the rash has gone, but it usually settles over time.

How to stop shingles spreading

⚠ Important

You cannot spread shingles to others. But people who have never had chickenpox could catch chickenpox from you.

Try to avoid coming into contact with:

- pregnant women who never had chickenpox before
- people with a weakened immune system – such as someone having chemotherapy
- babies less than 1 month old – unless it's your own baby, they should be protected from the virus by your immune system

Do not go to work or school if the rash is still oozing fluid (weeping) and cannot be covered, or until the rash has dried out.

You can only infect other people while the rash oozes fluid.

You can cover the rash with loose clothing or a non-sticky dressing.

Read more about [chickenpox](#).

Shingles and chickenpox

You cannot get shingles from someone with shingles or chickenpox.

But you can get chickenpox from someone with shingles if you haven't had chickenpox before.

When people get chickenpox, the virus remains in the body. It can be reactivated later and cause shingles if someone's immune system is lowered.

This can be because of stress, certain conditions, or treatments like chemotherapy.

Shingles and pregnancy

If you're pregnant and get shingles, there's no danger to your pregnancy or baby. Your GP should refer you to a specialist, as you may need antiviral treatment.

Shingles vaccination

A shingles vaccine is available on the market, but it is not given routinely in Ireland. The vaccine is not available through the medical card or drug payment schemes. Speak to your GP if you would like more information about the vaccine.

Sláintecare.

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