

Herpes Zoster (Shingles)

Unlike chicken pox, shingles is usually quite painful. It is important to see an ophthalmologist (Eye M.D.) when herpes zoster occurs on the face, because the virus can invade the eye. In about 10 to 25 percent of shingles patients, the infection can affect the nerves directly in the eyeball, causing serious eye problems.



Herpes zoster (shingles) vaccine

A vaccine is available to prevent herpes zoster. The vaccine has been shown to be effective in either preventing shingles from occurring or lessening the symptoms should it develop.

Symptoms

An outbreak of herpes zoster is often preceded by fatigue or flu-like symptoms. The first symptom is usually one-sided pain, tingling, or burning. The pain and burning may be severe and is usually present before any rash appears. Eventually, red patches appear on the skin, followed by small blisters.

The rash usually involves a narrow area from the spine to the front of the belly area or chest. However, the rash can appear on the face, eyes, mouth or ears. The blisters break and form ulcers, which dry and form crusts. The crusts fall off in two or three weeks.

Treatment

If you have herpes zoster, you will usually be treated with antiviral medications. In most cases, you can take this medicine by mouth, but in some cases you may need to receive treatment through a vein (intravenously). These drugs help reduce pain and complications and shorten the course of the disease.

Your doctor may also prescribe steroids as part of your treatment. Cool wet compresses can be used to reduce pain. Soothing baths and lotions, such as colloidal oatmeal bath, starch baths, or calamine lotion, may help to relieve itching and discomfort.