

OA Reablement service	OA Day Care	OA Residential Care	Domiciliary Services	DMH Day Services	DMH Supported Living	DMH Residential Services	EIA'd
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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SHINGLES (Herpes Zoster)

What is Shingles? (*Herpes Zoster*)

Shingles is an infection caused by the reactivation of a virus called Varicella Zoster virus - the virus which causes chickenpox. When a person has chickenpox the virus remains dormant in their body. Later in life, if the immune system is weakened (e.g. by illness, medical treatments such as high dose steroids or chemotherapy or age), this virus can reactivate. A person can have shingles more than once.

What are the symptoms?

Shingles causes:

- A painful itchy 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 that previously caused a person to have chickenpox. It is possible though to develop a chickenpox infection from close contact with 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 that may be more helpful in relieving the severe pain and discomfort.

Date	09/05/12							Issue date
Amendment	1							13/05/11 P&P

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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 (GP) who may prescribe antibiotics if appropriate.

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.

Exclusion from work

Until all lesions are dry and have crusted over: about 6 days.

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