



What is Herpes Zoster?

Herpes zoster, also known as shingles, gets its name from both Latin and French words for belt, or girdle, and refers to girdle – like skin eruptions on the trunk.

Anyone who's had chicken pox can develop herpes zoster, or shingles. The reason – the same virus that causes chicken pox causes zoster. The virus remains in a dormant state in certain nerve cells of the body and then reactivates, causing zoster. About 20 percent of the population are affected at some time during their lives.

What prompts the virus to "awaken" and cause problems in normal, healthy people is not clear. Most physicians believe there is a temporary weakness in the body's ability to fight off disease. This allows the virus to start reproducing and move along nerve fibers toward the skin. The fact that the disease occurs more often in people older than age 50 (although children can get it, too) supports this since the immune response is believed to be weaker in older people. Trauma or possibly stress may also trigger a zoster attack.

People who have had organ transplants and are taking drugs to ward off transplant rejection may also be more susceptible, as well as those with diseases that affect the immunological system, such as AIDS.

What are the symptoms of zoster?

The first symptom of zoster is a burning pain or tingling and extreme sensitivity in one area of the skin. This may be present for one to three days before a red rash occurs. There also may be a little fever or headache. The rash soon turns into groups of blisters that look a lot like chicken pox. The blisters generally last for two to three weeks. During that time pus collects in the blister. The blisters will then crust over and begin to disappear. The pain may last longer. It is unusual to have pain without blisters or blisters without pain.

How severe is the pain?

Usually the pain is severe enough for the physician to prescribe painkillers. The smart patient will take them rather than try to "grin and bear it."

Where does zoster usually appear on the body?

The blisters of zoster are most common on the trunk and buttocks. They can also appear on the face because the nerves of the head may be involved.

Great care must be taken if the blisters involve the eye region because permanent eye damage can result. If blisters appear on the tip of the nose, this signals possible eye involvement. The dermatologist will usually refer the patient to an ophthalmologist immediately.

What are the complications of zoster?

Post-herpetic neuralgia is a condition in which either constant pain or periods of pain can continue after the skin has healed. It can last for a long time – sometimes for years. This complication is more common in older people. Some physicians believe that the use of pain relievers for the zoster pain may help prevent this complication.

A bacterial infection of the blisters can also occur. This can delay the healing process. If healing seems to be progressing and then more pain and redness appears, the patient should return to the dermatologist. Antibiotic treatment may be necessary.

Another complication is when the disease spreads all over the body. This is similar to chicken pox. It happens in only about two to five percent of people. It also happens more often in those with other diseases or weakened immunological systems. Even internal organs may be affected by zoster.

How is zoster diagnosed?

Usually the diagnosis of zoster is based on the way the blisters look and pain on one side of the body. To be sure, the dermatologist may do a special test in which skin cells from a blister are examined under the microscope. If a certain type of cell damage is seen, this, combined with the location of the blisters and pain, gives the diagnosis. If there is still doubt, fluid-containing viruses can be examined and identified. Results are usually available in several days.

If someone has zoster, is there any reason to worry about a more serious disease or a poorly functioning immunological system?

If you have other medical problems or could have been exposed to AIDS virus, be sure to let your dermatologist know. Treatment of zoster would be different under these circumstances. The physician will ask questions about your medical history and may order certain tests, such as chest x-rays or blood studies, to make sure there are no other problems. The majority of people who develop zoster, however, are otherwise healthy.

Is zoster contagious?

The virus that causes zoster can be passed on to others, but they will develop chicken pox, not zoster. Zoster is much less contagious than chicken pox. Persons with zoster can only transmit the virus if blisters are broken and someone who never has had chicken pox or who already is ill is close by. Newborns or those who already are ill or immunosuppressed, such as cancer patients, are at the highest risk. Because of the risk of contagion for these people, patients with zoster are rarely hospitalized unless absolutely necessary.

Is there much scarring?

Usually scarring occurs only in persons who have more severe infections, such as those with weakened immune systems or elderly persons or those whose blisters become infected.

What about treatment?

We recommend using our Doctor's Solution for Shingles or Chicken Pox. When applied 4 – 5 times a day at the first sign of shingles outbreak, it can bring immediate relief to your burning pain and extreme sensitivity areas and speed up the healing process. Doctor's Solution for Shingles can only be used on the skin surfaces, never in the eyes.

Post-herpetic neuralgia can be treated with an anti-depressant drug at night and frequent use of pain relievers during the day. An ointment containing capsaicin, and extract of pepper, is also helpful for some people. The ointment is applied to painful areas of the skin three to four times a day. It causes release of a chemical in the skin that eases the pain.

We have had extremely good results with our Joshua Solution for Shingles and Chicken Pox over the past 25 years. Please see our testimonials pages for further information. If your symptoms are not significantly reduced you can return the product for a complete refund within 60 days.

Our products are not tested on animals.

*Joshua Skin Care Center: Phone (800) 992 0125 / Fax (602) 956 1561
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