



You came to the emergency department with a painful rash. The doctor thinks this is shingles, and it is safe to treat at home. This sheet explains what it is, how to ease the pain, and how to protect others.

What is it?

Shingles is caused by the chickenpox virus waking up again, often years later. It causes pain, tingling or burning, then a rash of blisters in a band on one side of the body or face. The blisters crust over in 7 to 10 days. Pain can last longer. You cannot catch shingles, but the fluid in the blisters can give chickenpox to others.

Looking after yourself at home

- Keep the rash clean, dry and loosely covered.
- Wear loose cotton clothing over the rash.
- A cool, damp cloth on the rash can ease the pain; do not use ice directly.
- Do not scratch or burst the blisters.
- Until the blisters crust, stay away from pregnant women, newborn babies, people with weak immunity, and anyone who has not had chickenpox.
- Wash your hands after touching the rash.

Medicines

- If you were given antiviral tablets, take the full course; they work best when started early.
- Paracetamol or ibuprofen can help with pain, unless your doctor told you not to. Follow the packet or your doctor's instructions.
- Avoid ibuprofen if you have a stomach ulcer, kidney disease, some types of asthma, or are pregnant, unless your doctor says it is safe.
- If the pain is severe or stops you sleeping, ask your doctor about other pain medicines.

Follow-up

- See your family doctor or health centre within 1 week, or sooner if pain is not controlled.
- See your doctor if pain continues after the rash has healed.
- Ask your doctor whether the shingles vaccine is right for you.

Come back to the emergency department or call an ambulance straight away if:

- Rash on or near your eye, or on the tip of your nose, or any change in vision
- Weakness of one side of the face, or rash in the ear with dizziness or hearing loss
- Severe headache, stiff neck, confusion, or unusual drowsiness
- The rash spreads widely over your body
- The skin around the rash becomes red, hot, swollen, or leaks pus, with fever



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This leaflet is general information to support the advice your doctor or nurse gave you today. It does not replace their advice. If you are worried, seek medical help.

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