

Herpes Zoster Ophthalmicus

This material will help you understand herpes zoster ophthalmicus, its causes, and treatment.

What is herpes zoster ophthalmicus?

Herpes zoster, which is commonly called shingles, is a viral disease. It causes a painful skin rash with small blisters that form scabs and can leave scars. When the disease involves the area surrounding your eye, this is known as herpes zoster ophthalmicus. Herpes zoster ophthalmicus can cause serious eye problems that include corneal ulcers, inflammation, and even glaucoma.

What causes herpes zoster ophthalmicus?

Herpes zoster is caused by the same virus that is responsible for chicken pox in children. The virus stays in your body once you have had the chicken pox. In some people, the chicken pox virus re-activates many years later and causes this painful skin rash called “shingles.” The specific reasons for this virus resurfacing are unknown. Older age, stress, or a weakened immune system might play a role in the virus re-activating.

If the skin rash appears around your eye and includes your upper eyelid, you may experience eye problems. These problems most often occur at the same time the skin rash is present or just as the skin rash begins to scab.

Those who have herpes zoster ophthalmicus may experience:

- Eye redness
- Excessive tearing
- Blurred vision
- Sensitivity to light

- Floaters
- Eye pain

These symptoms do not necessarily mean that you have herpes zoster ophthalmicus. However, if you have the shingles rash around your eye, you should be examined by an eye doctor as soon as possible. S/he will assess whether or not the virus has affected the inside of the eye.

What is the treatment of herpes zoster ophthalmicus?

Your primary care provider will treat the skin rash and the pain. They will prescribe an oral antiviral medication. They will also work with you to find medications that help treat your pain.

Your eye doctor will prescribe eye medications depending on if the virus is affecting the inside of the eye and what problems it is causing.

Herpes zoster, or shingles, is not contagious unless the person you are visiting is pregnant, very elderly or has a compromised immune system. Avoid contact with these people. Otherwise, you can be social while your rash is healing.

How can I prevent herpes zoster ophthalmicus?

Talk with your primary care doctor about getting the shingles vaccine. This is a one-time vaccine to reduce your chances of getting shingles.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends the shingles vaccine for anyone who is 60 years or older. (It does not matter if you remember having chicken pox as a child.) If your family members have not been vaccinated and are over the age of 60, they should talk to their doctors about getting vaccinated.

If you have shingles, you can still get the vaccine to reduce your chances of having it again in the future. The CDC recommends waiting until after your rash has healed to get the vaccine. Please talk to your primary care provider about the best time to be vaccinated.

For more information, scan these codes with your smartphone or visit the websites listed.



<http://www.geteyesmart.org/eyesmart/diseases/herpes-zoster-shingles/>



<http://www.kellogg.umich.edu/patientcare/conditions/herpes.zoster.html>

Disclaimer: This document contains information and/or instructional materials developed by the University of Michigan Health System (UMHS) for the typical patient with your condition. It may include links to online content that was not created by UMHS and for which UMHS does not assume responsibility. It does not replace medical advice from your health care provider because your experience may differ from that of the typical patient. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about this document, your condition or your treatment plan.

Author: Shayla Wilson, MPH candidate

Reviewers: Gale Oren, MILS and Paula Anne Newman-Casey, MD, MS

Patient Education by [University of Michigan Health System](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License](#). Last Revised 11/2014