



Scoil Náisiúnta Bhantiarna Lourdes

"Mol an óige 'is tiocfaidh sí"

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Dear Parent or Guardian,

There has been a case of **Shingles** in your child's classroom and your child may have been exposed.

What is shingles and how common is it?

Shingles is an infection of a nerve and the area of skin supplied by the nerve. It is caused by a virus called the varicella-zoster virus. It is the same virus that causes chickenpox. Anyone who has had chickenpox in the past may develop shingles. Shingles is sometimes called herpes zoster. About 1 in 5 people have shingles at some time in their life. It can occur at any age, but it is most common in people over the age of 50. It is uncommon to have shingles more than once, but about 1 person in 50 has shingles two or more times in their life.

How does shingles occur?

Most people have chickenpox at some stage (usually as a child). The virus does not completely go after you have chickenpox. Some virus particles remain inactive in the nerve roots next to your spinal cord. They do no harm there, and cause no symptoms. For reasons that are not clear, the virus may begin to multiply again (reactivate). This is often years later. The reactivated virus travels along the nerve to the skin to cause shingles. In most cases, an episode of shingles occurs for no apparent reason. Sometimes a period of stress or illness seems to trigger it. A minor ageing of the immune system may account for it being more common in older people. (The immune system keeps the virus inactive and prevents it from multiplying. A slight weakening of the immune system in older people may account for the virus reactivating and multiplying to cause shingles.) Shingles is also more common in people with a poor immune system (immunosuppression). For example, shingles commonly occurs in younger people who have HIV/AIDS or whose immune system is suppressed with treatment such as steroids or chemotherapy.

Shingles symptoms

The virus usually affects one nerve only, on one side of the body. Symptoms occur in the area of skin that the nerve supplies. The usual symptoms are pain and a rash. Occasionally, two or three nerves next to each other are affected.

The most commonly involved nerves are those supplying the skin on the chest or tummy (abdomen). The upper face (including an eye) is also a common site.

The **pain** is a localised band of pain. It can be anywhere on your body, depending on which nerve is affected. The pain can range from mild to severe. You may have a constant dull, burning, or gnawing

pain. In addition, or instead, you may have sharp and stabbing pains that come and go. The affected area of skin is usually tender.

The **rash** typically appears 2-3 days after the pain begins. Red blotches appear that quickly develop into itchy blisters. The rash looks like chickenpox, but only appears on the band of skin supplied by the affected nerve. New blisters may appear for up to a week. The soft tissues under and around the rash may become swollen for a while due to swelling (inflammation) caused by the virus. The blisters then dry up, form scabs, and gradually fade away. Slight scarring may occur where the blisters have been. An episode of shingles usually lasts 2-4 weeks. In some cases there is a rash but no pain. Rarely, there is no rash but just a band of pain.

You may also feel you have a high temperature (feel feverish) and unwell for a few days.

Is shingles contagious?

You can catch **chickenpox** from someone with shingles if you have not had chickenpox before. But most adults and older children have already had chickenpox, and so are immune. **You cannot get shingles from someone who has shingles.**

The shingles rash is contagious until all the blisters (vesicles) have scabbed and are dry. Also, if the blisters are covered with a dressing, it is unlikely that the virus will pass on to others. This is because the virus is passed on by direct contact with the blisters. (Therefore, if you have a job, you can return to work once the blisters have dried up, or earlier if you keep the rash covered and feel well enough.) However, as a general rule, pregnant women who have not had chickenpox should avoid people with shingles.

Also, if you have a poor immune system, you should avoid people with shingles. These general rules are to play safe, as it is direct contact with the rash that usually passes on the virus. Also, to play safe and not risk passing on the virus to others who may not have had chickenpox, you should not share towels, go swimming, or play contact sports such as rugby whilst you have a shingles rash.

This article is for information only and should not be used for the diagnosis or treatment of medical conditions. Thank you for giving this your attention. Your family doctor and local health clinic will be able to answer any further questions that you might have about shingles.

Le gach dea-ghuí,



(Principal)

This information is taken from www.patient.co.uk