



University of North Carolina Wilmington  
Abrons Student Health Center

## INSTRUCTION SHEET: SHINGLES

The Student Health Provider has diagnosed shingles, a viral infection causing an irritating or painful skin rash.

Shingles occurs only in persons who had chickenpox as a child. The chickenpox virus, which remained dormant (inactive) in the body, comes out to cause a blister-like rash similar to chickenpox. The shingles rash, however, only occurs on an isolated area on one side of the body. The rash most often appears on the chest, but can occur on any part of the body including the face.

The pain associated with shingles can be intense. The pain and rash last for weeks to months. Some individuals (especially older persons) have persistent pain even after the rash goes away.

### MEASURES YOU SHOULD TAKE TO HELP TREAT YOUR SHINGLES:

1. Rest at home as possible.
2. Over-the-counter pain medications can relieve discomfort associated with shingles. Acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen, or naproxen can be taken, depending on individual preference.
3. The provider may prescribe stronger pain medication. Take this medication as prescribed and only if needed. Do not take the prescription pain medication and perform dangerous tasks (driving, operating machinery, climbing on a ladder, etc.).
4. Antiviral medication helps treat shingles in some cases. If medication is prescribed, take it as directed.
5. Clean the rash daily with soap and water. Liquid hand soap may be gentler on the skin. If you suspect bacterial (germ) infection of the skin (in addition to the shingles rash), return to the Student Health Center or see your personal/referral provider *promptly*. Signs of bacterial infection include: pus, red streaks, increasing redness and swelling, and fever.
6. Avoid exposure to immune-suppressed persons. Immune-suppressed persons (on chemotherapy for cancer, having AIDS, etc.) can get a severe, life-threatening infection from you. Healthy people have nothing to fear from being around you, though it is best to avoid direct (touching) contact with pregnant females, just to be safe.
7. If the outbreak of shingles is on your face and you have *any* symptoms in your eye, see an eye doctor (ophthalmologist) *at once*. Call or return to the Student Health Center or go to the nearest emergency department if you are unable to get an appointment with an ophthalmologist promptly.
8. Schedule a follow-up appointment with your personal/referral doctor or return to the Student Health Center as directed. Your provider can help you control pain and avoid complications.