

WHAT IS SHINGLES?

Shingles is a painful reactivation of the ‘chickenpox virus’ in adulthood^{1A}

- Shingles (herpes zoster) is an outbreak of a painful rash or blisters on the skin that is caused by a reactivation of the virus that causes chicken pox – the varicella-zoster virus.^{1A}
- For older people, shingles can be a serious condition – the associated pain can be debilitating and is difficult to treat once established – diminishing the quality of life for those who suffer.^{2A,3A}
- Shingles incidence has significantly increased in recent years, particularly among those aged over 60 – with GP consultations for shingles among this age group having increased by an estimated 51 per cent in recent years.^{4A,4B}
- After an episode of chicken pox, the zoster virus lies dormant in the body in nerve roots near the spinal cord.^{3B} The virus can reactivate decades later causing a shingles infection.^{3C} With over 97 per cent of Australian adults over 30 exposed to the chicken pox virus, the majority of the population is at risk of developing shingles.^{5A}
- 1 in 3 Australians will experience shingles in their lifetime, and it is estimated that by 85 years of age, one in every two Australians will have experienced an episode of shingles.^{3D,3E,7A}

Up to half of people over 50 who have shingles will develop long term nerve pain^{8A}

- A common yet little known complication of shingles is post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN), a chronic and debilitating form of nerve pain, which is difficult to treat and can persist long after the rash has healed, lasting on average for 3.5 years.^{7B,7C,8B,9A}
- The incidence of PHN cases has increased in recent years by an estimated 84 per cent, in alignment with the increased cases of shingles.^{4C}
- The risk and severity of PHN increases with age, with up to 50 per cent of Australians aged 50 years and over with shingles developing PHN.^{8C}

DON'T SHHH SHINGLES

Pain and complications of shingles can be serious and long-lasting^{10A}

- The pain and discomfort associated with shingles and PHN can be prolonged and disabling, diminishing the individual’s quality of life and ability to function to a degree comparable to that in diseases such as congestive heart failure, heart attack or major depression.^{10B}
- Approximately half of people with shingles or PHN would describe their pain as “horrible” or “excruciating”, ranging in duration from a few minutes to constant on a daily or almost daily basis.^{3F}
- PHN can have a considerable effect on sleep and mood and can lead to withdrawal and social isolation.^{3G,11A}
- PHN can also interfere with a person’s ability to work, with one study finding 65 per cent of those who were working when they acquired shingles have reported an absence from work.^{6A,12A}
- There is currently no cure for shingles or PHN – Antiviral therapy can reduce the severity and duration of shingles, but does not prevent the development of PHN.^{10C}
- With Australia’s ageing population, the prevalence of shingles and PHN is expected to increase significantly in the coming years, increasing the burden on the Australian health care system.^{6B,2B,4E,4F,4G,4H}

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