

Herpes Zoster

What is herpes zoster?

Herpes zoster, commonly known as “shingles”, is caused by a virus that leads to a characteristic skin rash of small vesicles (blisters) which will form crusts, and may leave scars.

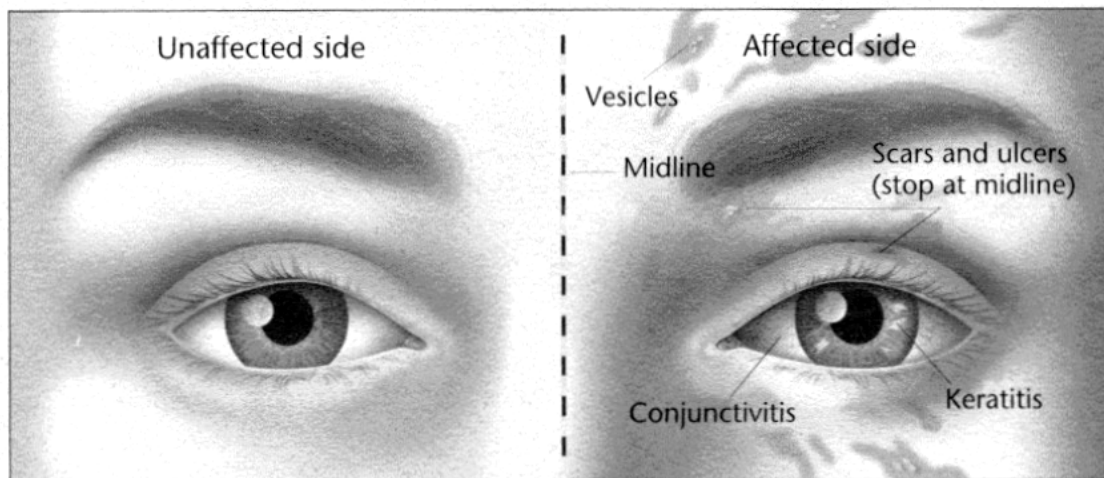
The first symptom is often pain, itching or tingling of the skin, followed by red ness and warmth and finally the appearance of the characteristic blisters. These blisters follow the route of an infected nerve. The outbreak of shingles is often accompanied by headache, fever,

may require treatment long after all other evidence of the shingles has gone. The pain can sometimes be permanent.

What causes herpes zoster?

Herpes zoster is the same virus that causes chicken pox. The virus lies dormant in the nerve cell and usually does not cause problems. However, it can reactivate from a variety of causes such as age, stress, reduced immunity and rarely re-exposure to the zoster virus.

It is estimated that up to one in five people may experience an attack of shingles. Shingles is not as infectious as chicken, but it is important for someone



Patient with herpes zoster

Malaise, and chills. Adjacent lymph nodes are often tender.

The pain is often severe, and is described as burning or throbbing. The skin is extremely sensitive. The rash lasts three to six weeks, but pain in the involved area can persist for months to years. This pain, called “post-herpetic neuralgia,”

with shingles to avoid those who may be more easily infected, such as infants, pregnant women and people with a weakened immune system.

A widespread infection of herpes zoster, or an infection in a young person, may be a sign of a weakened immune system

The immune system may be weakened by diseases such as HIV and cancer.

How does herpes zoster affect the eye?

When shingles occurs around the eye, it is called “herpes zoster ophthalmicus” (HZO). HZO can cause a number of problems with the eye, both short and long term:

- skin rash;
- redness, burning and discharge (conjunctivitis);
- corneal inflammation and scarring (keratitis);
- numbness of the cornea;
- blurred vision and light sensitivity (iritis).

Less common problems include glaucoma, enlarged pupil, double vision, infection of the back of the eye (retinitis) and inflammation of the optic nerve behind the eye (optic neuritis).

These problems may appear at the same time as the skin rash, or weeks after the vesicles have disappeared. Sometimes, symptoms of light sensitivity, redness and irritation may persist for months. The sensory nerves around the eye may remain extraordinarily sensitive for years after the attack of HZO.

What are the treatments for HZO?

The treatments for HZO include: antiviral medications

- antiviral medications;
- antiinflammatory medications (steroid and nonsteroidal);
- pain medications.

Your ophthalmologist may recommend treatment of other eye diseases including dry eye and glaucoma.

HZO and its complications can cause loss of vision. Long term consequences of HZO can include eyelid scarring, corneal scars, cataract and glaucoma — all unusual but sight-threatening problems that may require surgery. Report any symptoms to your ophthalmologist promptly.

Compliments of Your Ophthalmologist

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