

## Health Notes by Evelyn Ames      *Shingles: Is A Vaccination Recommended?*

Most of our WWURA members when they were youngsters more than likely had chicken pox, a viral infection caused by the varicella zoster virus. It is known that the virus stays in the body in a dormant (inactive) state. For reasons not fully known, this virus can reactivate years later, causing shingles. According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, almost 1 out of every 3 people in the United States will develop shingles. “Anyone who has recovered from chickenpox may develop shingles; even children can get shingles. However the risk of disease increases as a person gets older. About half of all cases occur among men and women 60 years old or older.”

<http://www.cdc.gov/shingles/about/symptoms.html>

**Signs and Symptoms:** Shingles usually starts as a painful rash on one side of the face or body. The rash forms blisters that typically scab over in 7–10 days and clears up within 2–4 weeks. Before the rash develops, there is often pain, itching, or tingling in the area where the rash will develop. This may happen anywhere from 1 to 5 days before the rash appears. Most commonly, the rash occurs in a single stripe around either the left or the right side of the body. In other cases, the rash occurs on one side of the face. In rare cases (usually among people with weakened immune systems), the rash may be more widespread and look similar to a chickenpox rash. Shingles can affect the eye and cause loss of vision. (CDC)

**Transmission:** Shingles cannot be passed from one person to another. However, the virus that causes shingles, the varicella zoster virus, can be spread from a person with active shingles to a person who has never had chickenpox. In such cases, the person exposed to the virus might develop chickenpox, but they would not develop shingles. The virus is spread through direct contact with fluid from the rash blisters, not through sneezing, coughing or casual contact. A person with shingles can spread the virus when the rash is in the blister-phase. A person is not infectious before blisters appear. Once the rash has developed crusts, the person is no longer contagious. <http://www.cdc.gov/shingles/about/transmission.html>

**Prevention:** Until a few years ago, physicians debated whether to recommend all their patients get a vaccination for shingles. Since the incidence of shingles has risen considerably among the older population and some health insurance companies are now including the vaccination in their medical benefits, physicians are recommending older adults acquire the vaccination. A vaccine for shingles is licensed for persons aged 60 years and older.

**Treatment:** “Several antiviral medicines—acyclovir, valacyclovir, and famciclovir—are available to treat shingles. These medicines will help shorten the length and severity of the illness. But to be effective, they must be started as soon as possible after the rash appears. Thus, people who have or think they might have shingles should call their healthcare provider as soon as possible to discuss treatment options. Analgesics (pain medicine) may help relieve the pain caused by shingles. Wet compresses, calamine lotion, and colloidal oatmeal baths may help relieve some of the itching.”

<http://www.cdc.gov/shingles/about/prevention-treatment.html>

**Question:** How might you sharpen your mind and improve your spirits? One of the three things recommended in the 2011 October issue of *Consumer Reports on Health* is that everyone eat breakfast (which includes protein, complex carbohydrates, and healthy fat) within 90 minutes of waking every morning. Studies suggest people have better cognitive performance and brighter moods during the day!