



## Patient Information

# Shingles and the Eye Herpes Zoster Ophthalmicus

After having chickenpox, the virus varicella zoster, remains inactive or dormant in the body. For around 20% of people the virus may be reactivated resulting in a painful rash with blisters, known as shingles, which can affect various parts on one side of the body.

Ageing, stress, fatigue and other illnesses or medical treatment such as chemotherapy can also cause a weakening of the immune system and lead to shingles.

When the shingles comes out around the eye it is called herpes zoster ophthalmicus (HZO), as it affects the ophthalmic nerve. HZO accounts for 10-25% of all cases of shingles.

The painful rash affects one side of the forehead, nose, or as you have found, the eye itself may become involved. The vision may become blurred or the eye becomes red, watery and sore.

The treatment of shingles is with antiviral tablets and cream to the skin, as soon as possible after the rash begins and an eye ointment and/or drops for the eye. To be effective the antiviral tablets must be started within three days of the rash appearing, this will relieve the pain and shorten the attack.

While the rash lasts in its blister-like form, because shingles is infectious, it is possible for people to catch chicken pox from you at this stage, if they have not previously had it.

The rash itself may take several weeks to completely disappear.

Meanwhile:

- It is advisable to have your own separate towel and flannel which are regularly laundered
- Take paracetamol to ease pain
- Keep the rash clean and dry to reduce the risk of infection



# Shingles and the Eye

## Herpes Zoster Ophthalmicus

Shingles can be an extremely painful and debilitating condition and the skin may be sensitive to touch.

Your General Practitioner (GP) will be able to provide stronger pain relief and should you need, sleeping tablets.

### Contact details

**Eye Clinic Triage Telephone number: 01793 604868**

Monday to Friday 0900-2100:

Saturday/Sunday/Bank Holidays 0900-1300

Smoking will not be permitted on any NHS site in England. Smoking will not be permitted within any of our buildings or anywhere outside on our sites. Smoking facilities will not be provided. Please be considerate of others when vaping in hospital grounds.

**This information sheet is available to order in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 01793 604031 or email [gwh.pals@nhs.net](mailto:gwh.pals@nhs.net)**

#### Document Control

Division: Planned care

Department: Ophthalmology

Approved Date: 14 July 2020

Next Review Date: August 2023

Document Number: PC - PIL0164