

## Herpes Zoster

The varicella zoster virus (*VZV*) is a member of the **herpes virus** group. It causes the disease **chickenpox** (*varicella*) and **shingles** (*herpes zoster*). The virus is very contagious and may be spread by direct contact or droplets.

Chickenpox is primarily a **disease of childhood**, which peaks at school-age in the winter and spring. It is characterized by the appearance on skin and mucous membranes of successive crops of typical **pruritic vesicular lesions** that are easily broken and become scabbed. It is generally accompanied by mild constitutional symptoms (*fever; malaise*). It is **most contagious** one day before the onset of the rash and until all the vesicles have crusted. It is relatively benign in children, but adult infection may be complicated by pneumonia and encephalitis. **Note: Studies of immunocompromised patients who received ZIG (*zoster immune globulin*) after exposure to VZV virus showed that they tended to have lower- than-expected clinical attack rates and higher-than-expected rates of sub-clinical infection when ZIG was administered no later than 96 hours after exposure.**

**Shingles** (*herpes zoster*) is the result of **reactivation of a latent varicella-zoster virus** that is believed to reside in the sacral ganglia from a childhood case of chickenpox. The virus reaches the sensory ganglia of the spinal and cranial nerves, producing an inflammatory response. It is characterized by **painful vesicles** that occur on the skin or mucosal surfaces along the distribution of a sensory nerve in a **distinctive unilateral pattern**.

**Note:** The histology for both chickenpox and shingles shows the **same cytopathic effect** as seen in herpes simplex.