

Pharmacy First: Shingles

NICE CKS Shingles | NHS England Pharmacy First PGDs 2a/2b v1.1 (Oct 2025)

REFER NOW: Red Flags

- Hutchinson's sign (rash on tip, side, or root of nose), visual symptoms, or unexplained red eye: A&E; urgently (ophthalmic shingles)
- Head or neck shingles (scalp, face, neck): refer to GP or A&E.; Excluded from both PGDs (v1.1 update Oct 2025).
- Facial nerve palsy with ear pain/vesicles (Ramsay Hunt syndrome): A&E; urgently
- Meningitis, encephalitis, myelitis: A&E; urgently
- Severely immunosuppressed: A&E; urgently
- Pregnancy: refer to GP urgently

Sepsis: call 999. Outside 7-day window: refer to GP.

Window	Time from rash	Any one criterion required
Window 1	Within 72 hours	Non-truncal (limbs/perineum) OR moderate-severe pain OR confluent rash OR age over 50
Window 2	Within 7 days	Continued vesicle formation OR severe pain OR severe eczema/high risk OR age 70 and over
Immunosuppressed (non-severe)	Within 7 days	Use valaciclovir PGD 2b only. Rash not widespread/severe. Systemically well.

Antiviral	Dose	When to prefer
Aciclovir (PGD 2a)	800mg five times daily for 7 days	Most patients. Excluded if eGFR below 30.
Valaciclovir (PGD 2b)	1g three times daily for 7 days	8 or more medicines, carer-assisted, or non-severely immunosuppressed. Excluded if eGFR below 60.

CHECK: Before Supplying

- Age 18 and over. Within treatment window confirmed.
- Renal function: eGFR checked (below 30 excludes aciclovir; below 60 excludes valaciclovir)
- Drug interactions: ciclosporin, tacrolimus, mycophenolate, aminophylline, theophylline (must not supply)
- Nephrotoxic drugs (ACE inhibitors, ARBs, diuretics, NSAIDs, metformin): caution, advise hydration
- Not on long-term aciclovir or valaciclovir prophylaxis

Counselling and contagion: Complete the 7-day course. Aciclovir: every 4 hours during waking hours (5 doses over 16 hours). Maintain adequate fluid intake, especially in older adults. Do NOT apply topical creams or adhesive dressings to the rash (delays healing). Infectious until all vesicles crusted (usually 5-7 days from onset). Avoid pregnant individuals, immunosuppressed individuals, and babies under 1 month. After recovery: discuss shingles vaccine with GP.