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You don't normally associate shingles with younger folks, or even consider the condition an issue among those serving in the military. So I was really surprised to read an article this week in the in the Military Times on "Shingles on the Rise Among Service Members."

We've all heard how painful shingles can be, yet at the same time many, like myself knew little about the condition other than its association with chickenpox until recent years.

As you know chickenpox and shingles are caused by similar viruses. After having chickenpox the virus can remain inactive or 'asleep' in your nerves for years. Then suddenly the virus can become active by a physical or stressful event and your body reacts through a painful outbreak of a blister-like rash on one side of the body and you can have headaches and flu-like symptoms taking 3-5 weeks to subside.

Researchers note a marked increase in adult shingles by 90% in the last 2 decades.

According to the Times, a [July 2011 Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center Report](#) highlights a study that finds shingles has been on the rise in the military as well.

*"Between 2000 and 2010, annual cases of shingles rose steadily in the armed forces from fewer than 2,000 to nearly 3,500, for a total of 30,195 over that span."*

The study pointed to higher rates of shingles in:

- health care workers and pilots
- the Coast Guard and Air Force
- women
- white non-Hispanic populations (black non-Hispanic has the lowest rate)

The average age for the Coast Guard and Air Force is 30 years.

For years adults who had chickenpox as a child received immunity booster shots when exposed to children with chickenpox. Through childhood vaccinations and surveillance efforts, the rates of childhood-chickenpox has been on the decline and has lessened the likelihood of adults getting the disease.

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[Health Care Resources \(46\)](#)

[Health Care Testimony \(3\)](#)

[Mental Health \(6\)](#)

[Uncategorized \(5\)](#)

[VA \(3\)](#)

So what the military is experiencing, is the same as what is playing out in the civilian sector, that is, as chickenpox rates decline, shingles rates are on the rise. Some researchers see evidence of an epidemic of shingle occurring in our country.

It is interesting when you think about modern medicine—on the one hand we've managed to control the massive outbreak of chickenpox, but in its place, shingles—another formidable condition requiring our attention.

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