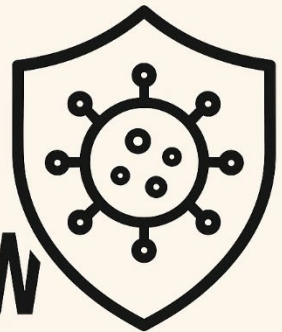


Healthy Outcomes

"The bad news is time flies. The good news is you're the pilot." – Michael Altshuler

Central PA Health Care
Quality Unit
Quarterly Newsletter
Winter 2026

SHINGLES: WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW



Don't Let Shingles Catch You Off Guard!

Johns Hopkins Medicine

Shingles (*herpes zoster*) is a viral infection caused by the reactivation of the chickenpox virus. If you have had chickenpox, you already carry the varicella-zoster virus in your body. This means the virus stays dormant in your nerve tissue and can reactivate later in life, especially if your immune system weakens.

It is most common in adults over 50 and those with weakened immune systems.

Early Signs:

- Tingling, itching, or burning in one area.
- Followed by a painful rash and blisters, usually on one side of the body or face.

WHAT'S NEW

Don't Let Shingles Catch You Off Guard!

Supporting an Individual with ID During the Grieving Process

Bereavement - A Guide for Professionals

Bereavement - A Guide for Autistic Adults

Upcoming HCQU Trainings

HCQU Online Trainings

HCQU Technical Assistance

Vegetarian Chili for Two

- Blisters scab over in 7-10 days; full recovery takes 2-4 weeks.

Complications:

- [Postherpetic Neuralgia \(PHN\)](#): chronic nerve pain after rash heals. This pain may feel burning, sharp, and jabbing. Or it may feel deep and aching.
- Skin infections
- Vision problems if near the eyes. When an infection happens near or on the eyes, a corneal infection can happen. This can lead to temporary or permanent blindness.

Treatment:

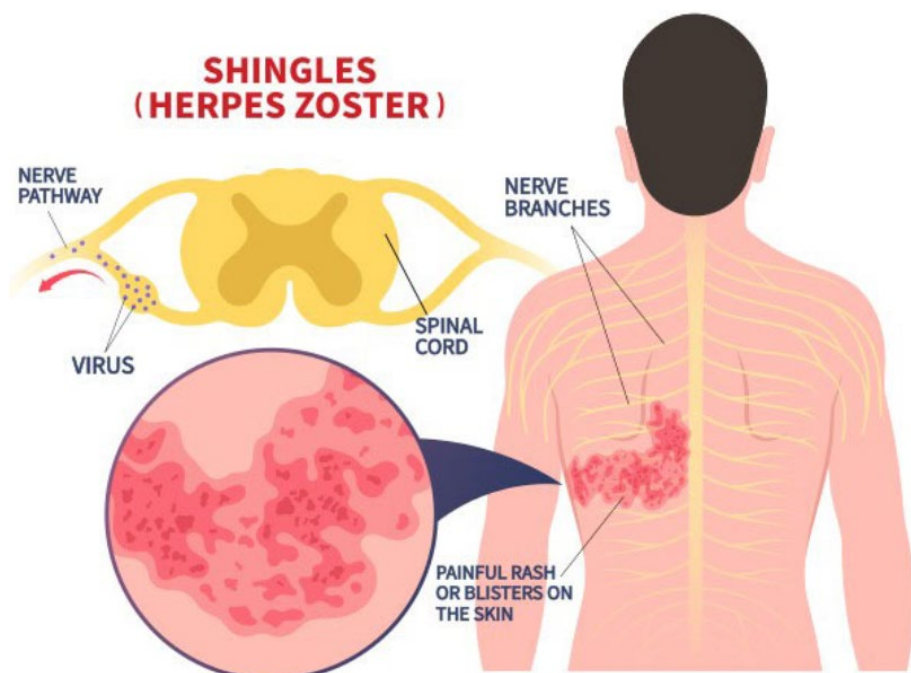
- Antiviral medications to shorten illness and reduce nerve damage.
- Pain relief: creams, compresses, painkillers, and sometimes steroids or nerve pain medications

Prevention:

- **RZV vaccine** recommended for adults 50+, even if previously vaccinated or had shingles.
- Two doses, 2-6 months apart

Act Quickly: If you suspect shingles, contact your healthcare provider immediately for prompt treatment.

Read the full article: [Shingles](#)



Frequently Asked Questions About Shingles

Can shingles spread to others?

You cannot give someone shingles, but the virus can cause chickenpox in people who have not had it or been vaccinated.

How long does shingles last?

Most cases clear in 2-4 weeks, but pain can linger longer in some people.

How do I know if my rash is shingles?

Shingles usually appears as a painful, blistering rash on one side of the body or face, often preceded by tingling or burning.

How soon should I start treatment?

Start antiviral medication as soon as possible—ideally within 72 hours of symptoms.

Can shingles come back?

Yes, shingles can recur, though it is uncommon.

What if you are not sure whether you have had chickenpox?

Most adults have had chickenpox (even if they do not remember), so you likely carry the virus.

You can still get shingles even if you are unsure about your chickenpox history.

The shingles vaccine is recommended for adults 50+ regardless of whether you recall having chickenpox or not.

If you want to confirm, your doctor can order a blood test to check for immunity to varicella (the chickenpox virus).

Shingles can be quite painful, and the pain can sometimes linger even after the rash has cleared, a condition known as post herpetic neuralgia. While not life threatening, shingles can be extremely uncomfortable and disruptive.

SUPPORTING AN INDIVIDUAL WITH ID DURING THE GRIEVING PROCESS

By Margaret Walsh, M.A., BCBA

When a cherished person dies, the challenge for the living is to find a way to honor the deceased loved one while trying to learn to live without them. While adjusting to this loss, a person is most likely to experience grief.

Grief impacts our emotions and our physical and mental health. It can cause us to question spiritual beliefs, change the way we react to basic daily routines, and challenge our relationships with loved ones. No one experiences grief in the same way, and it isn't clear when it begins and ends. Adults with intellectual disabilities (ID) also experience grief. Recognizing it and supporting a person with ID as they process grief can be demanding for caregivers.

Talking about death and grieving is an unwelcome conversation for most people, including those with ID. The truth is, avoiding sadness and the myriads of complex emotions around the loss of a loved one can hinder the process of grieving.

Unacknowledged or unaddressed sadness can also lead to significant health problems. For adults with ID, caregivers need to initiate these conversations sensitively and in a way that takes their needs into account. [Read more.](#)

Caregivers are encouraged to prepare the individual for social situations like funerals, offer coping strategies, and create meaningful ways to honor the deceased, recognizing that grief has no fixed timeline.



Here are the **key caregiver strategies** from the article:

- **Use clear, direct language:** Say "died" instead of euphemisms like "passed away" to avoid confusion.
- **Keep communication simple and validate emotions:** Allow questions and acknowledge feelings.
- **Provide individualized communication support:** Use icons, devices, or other tools for nonverbal individuals.
- **Check in frequently:** Continue conversations about the loss; silence doesn't mean grief is resolved.
- **Involve the person in memorial activities:** Let them choose songs, pictures, or flowers for the service.
- **Prepare for social situations like funerals:** Explain what will happen, discuss others' grief behaviors, and create a coping plan if they feel uncomfortable.
- **Offer ongoing ways to honor the loved one:** Memory books, planting a tree, or planning a special trip.
- **Recognize grief has no timeline:** Support the person through ups and downs without rushing the process.

BEREAVEMENT - A GUIDE FOR PROFESSIONALS

HOW MIGHT BEREAVEMENT AFFECT AN AUTISTIC PERSON?

When grieving over the death of someone or something important to them, autistic people may show typical grief responses, such as:

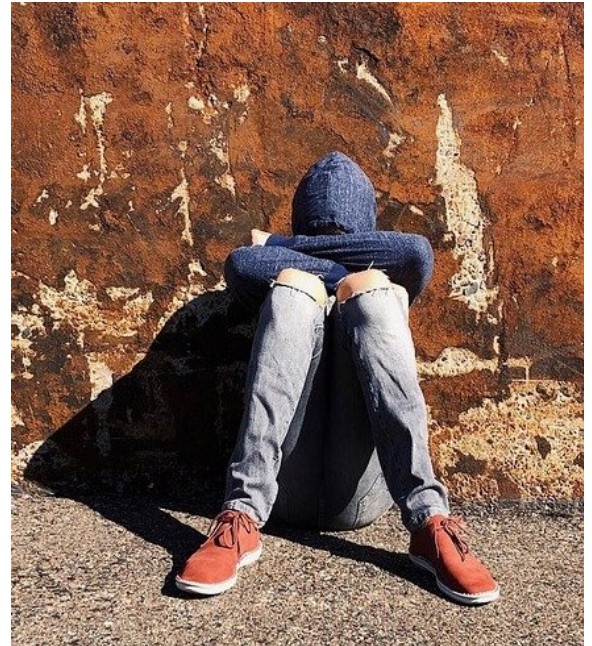
- anger
- increased restlessness
- changes to their sleeping and eating patterns
- an increased dependence on others
- a loss of previously displayed skills and confidence.

They may also show other feelings or responses, such as:

- a failure to grieve or delayed grief
- aggressive behavior
- excitement.

Autistic people may find it difficult to express their own feelings around bereavement.

They may struggle to understand the concept of death and loss and how they are supposed to behave when someone dies.



For some autistic people, the death of someone or something close to them may be overwhelming. Their grief will need to be recognized and understood. They will need time and space to express their feelings.

Be aware that when an autistic person is experiencing grief, their autistic traits may become more apparent. This is something autistic people highlight in their personal accounts of going through a bereavement.

Autistic people's personal accounts of bereavement and the grieving process suggest they may react differently to non-autistic people.

Autistic people have said that they:

- may have difficulty being able to connect with their emotions
- may or may not cry or show emotions
- might show a delayed or extreme emotional response
- might experience an increase in their autistic traits, like sensory differences, meltdowns and shutdowns
- might find it harder to organize, plan and concentrate on tasks. These skills are also known as executive functioning
- may have difficulty understanding what to do in social situations such as hospital visits and funerals.



BEREAVEMENT - [A GUIDE FOR AUTISTIC ADULTS](#)

Avoiding conversations about death and grief with individuals who have intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD) can lead to significant emotional and mental health challenges, including complicated grief.

Here are some key points to consider and practical strategies:

Why Preparation Matters

- **Understanding and Coping:** People with IDD often experience loss just like anyone else, but without preparation, they may feel confused, abandoned, or fearful.
- **Behavioral Impact:** Unaddressed grief can manifest as anxiety, aggression, withdrawal, or regression in skills.
- **Mental Health Risks:** Complicated grief can lead to depression, chronic stress, and even physical health issues.

Common Barriers/Reasons Caregivers Avoid the Topic

1. Assumption of Lack of Understanding

- **Reality:** Many individuals can understand death when explained in concrete, simple terms.

2. Fear of Triggering Behaviors

- **Reality:** Avoidance often worsens behaviors because the person senses something is wrong but doesn't know what.

3. Feeling Unprepared to Help

- **Reality:** Caregivers can learn strategies to support grief, even without being mental health professionals.
-

Best Practices for Supporting People with IDD Through Grief

- **Start Early:** Introduce concepts of life cycles and death before a loss occurs (e.g., through pets, plants).
- **Use Clear Language:** Avoid euphemisms like "passed away" or "went to sleep," which can confuse.
- **Visual Supports:** Pictures, social stories, and memory books help explain and process loss.
- **Validate Feelings:** Acknowledge sadness and allow expression through words, art, or rituals.
- **Include Them in Rituals:** Attending funerals or memorials (with preparation) can provide closure.
- **Seek Professional Help When Needed:** Grief counselors experienced with IDD can be invaluable.



Upcoming HCQU Training Opportunities

Stay informed and enhance your skills with these upcoming sessions designed to support quality care for individuals with IDD and Autism.

January

- **HCQU Fatal 5 Overview**

January 28 | 10:00–11:30 AM

Learn about the five leading health risks impacting individuals with IDD and strategies to prevent them.

- **HCQU Head to Toe Skin Checks**

January 29 | 1:00–2:00 PM

Best practices for identifying and addressing skin concerns early.

February

- **HCQU Dysphagia and Mealtime Safety**

February 4 | 1:00–2:00 PM

Tips for safe eating and reducing choking risks.

- **Safer Medication Prescribing Made Simple**

February 5 | 10:00 AM

Presented by Ryley B. Uber, PharmD & Hanah Holloway, PharmD (Geisinger).

Explore pharmacogenomics and polypharmacy management strategies.

- **HCQU Constipation and Bowel Management**

February 11 | 10:00–11:00 AM

Understand causes, prevention, and treatment options.

- **Emergencies: Are You Ready?**

February 18 | 10:00 AM

February 25 | 1:00 PM

Presented by Deb Erdman RN MSN (Geisinger).

Prepare for emergency situations with confidence.

Access the
HCQU Website
Training
Calendar

**Registration is
not
required—**
simply select
the session
you'd like to
attend and join
at the
scheduled
time.

March

- **Epilepsy Training for Direct Care/Support Staff**

March 11 | 10:00 AM

Presented by Rena Loughlin, MS.

Learn seizure recognition and first aid for adults with IDD and Autism.

- **HCQU Fatal 5 Overview**

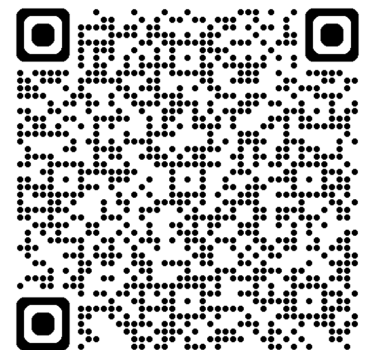
March 18 | 10:00–11:30 AM

A second opportunity to attend this essential training.

- **HCQU Sepsis Awareness**

March 24 | 10:00 AM

Recognize early signs and prevent life-threatening infections.



Want to see all upcoming training? Scan the QR code.

Visit the **HCQU Training Calendar** for complete details and additional sessions:

👉 **Access the HCQU Training Calendar [Here](#)**

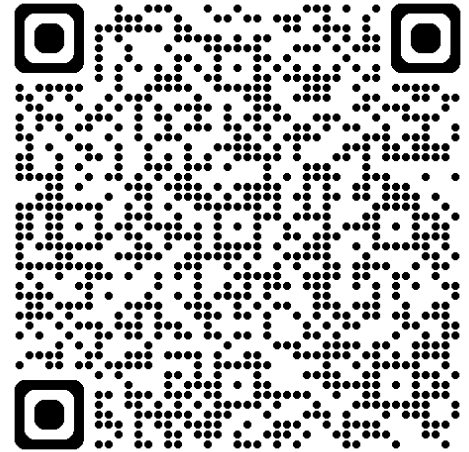
Expand Your Healthcare Knowledge

Free Online Courses Available!

The **Central Pennsylvania Health Care Quality Unit** offers a variety of **free online courses** for anyone interested in learning more about key healthcare topics. These courses cover areas such as **aging, mental health, nutrition, safety**, and more.

Completing courses can help you **earn credit toward your annual human services training requirement**—a great way to stay informed and meet your professional goals!

If you experience any issues accessing the courses, please contact **Kristy Campbell** at **570-214-4753** or **kacampbell@geisinger.edu**.



Welcome to the Central Pennsylvania Health Care Quality Unit Online Learning System.

Click on the course you are interested in taking and follow the directions given

[Aging and Developmental Disabilities](#)[Dental Health](#)[Allergy Awareness](#)[GERD](#)[Alzheimer's](#)[High Blood Pressure](#)[Bloodborne Pathogens](#)[Menopause](#)[Bowel Management](#)[Skin Health and Pressure Injuries](#)[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)[Sepsis](#)[Dehydration](#)[Urinary Tract Infections](#)[List of Older Online Courses](#)

HCQU Technical Assistance (TA) Services

In addition to providing training, the HCQU offers **Technical Assistance (TA)**, which may include:

- Medical record reviews
- Medication reviews
- Dysphagia risk assessments
- Fall risk reviews.

Important:

To avoid delays, requestors should **promptly email all supportive documentation** to the HCQU nurse after submitting a TA request.

Incomplete or missing documentation will result in a delay in conducting the review.

Referral Forms:

[Central PA HCQU Referral Request Form](#)

[Blair County HCQU Referral Form](#)

Record reviews supportive documentation

- Up-to-date medication list
- Lifetime medical history
- Any details pertinent to the record review/what prompted the request.

Medication reviews supportive documentation

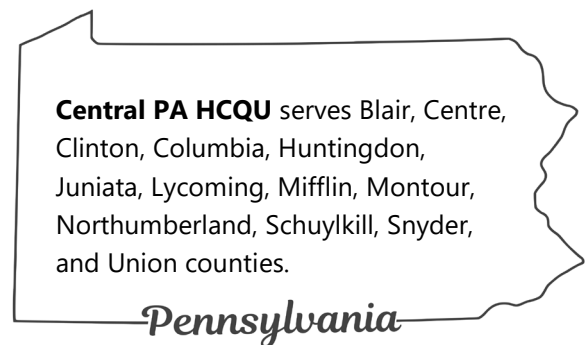
- Up to date medication list
- Lifetime medical history
- Any details on what prompted the request/what is going on with the individual.

Dysphagia reviews supportive documentation

- Up-to-date medication list
- Lifetime medical history
- Dysphagia mealtime checklist available on HCQU website
- Individuals' diet
- Any details pertinent to the dysphagia review/what prompted the request.

Fall risk reviews supportive documentation

- Up-to-date medication list
- Lifetime medical history
- Environmental checklist
- Any details pertinent to the fall(s)/what prompted the request.



"Our regional HCQU nurse, Sandy, has been extremely valuable in Blair County. We are so grateful that she is part of our Human Rights Committee and our Technical Assistance Support Team. Her wide range of knowledge and her expertise are helpful to the people we support and the people who care for them."

Catie Richards-Dual Diagnosis Navigator Southern Alleghenies Service Management Group

Sweet Potato & Black Bean Chili for Two

By Kemen Ikaztegieta

Here's a simple, flavorful plan for your vegetarian chili meal for two:

Ingredients:

2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 small onion, finely diced
1 small, sweet potato, peeled and diced
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 tablespoon chili powder
2 teaspoons ground cumin
1/4 teaspoon ground chipotle chile,
1/8 teaspoon salt, or to taste
1 1/3 cups water
1 15-ounce can of black beans, rinsed.
1 cup of canned diced tomatoes
2 teaspoons lime juice
2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro.

[Eating Well Full Recipe](#)



Wishing you a New Year filled with hope, health, and success.

We are deeply grateful for the opportunity to partner with you in supporting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and autism. Every day, we are inspired by the resilience and strength of those we serve, and it is our privilege to contribute to their health, well-being, and quality of life.



HCQU Staff: Sandy Corrigan (Blair), Eileen Musgrave (Centre, Lycoming/Canton), Amy Weidner (Northumberland, Schuylkill), Kristy Campell (Data Analyst), Patty Brofee (Training Coordinator), Nissa Freeze (CMSU Wellness Nurse), Cheryl Callahan (Director), Laura Aungst (CMSU), and Traci Dunkelberger (HMJ).

Let the Central PA HCQU help you!

Our HCQU includes registered nurses experienced in serving individuals with an intellectual disability (ID) and or autism and their support staff and families visit our [website](#) for their contact information the counties they support and our upcoming trainings.