

# Shigellosis

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is shigellosis?

Shigellosis (shig-el-OH-sis) is an intestinal illness caused by infection with *Shigella* bacteria. Each year about 18,000 cases of shigellosis are reported in the United States. However because many people with mild cases may not report their symptoms, the actual number of shigellosis cases may be higher.

### Who gets shigellosis?

Anyone can get shigellosis. However, it is most common in young children 2 to 4 years of age. Children who attend child care centers are at greater risk for acquiring this infection from other children. Others at risk for contracting shigellosis include men who have sex with men, institutionalized persons, and foreign travelers to certain countries.

### How do people get shigellosis?

People become infected with the *Shigella* bacteria by swallowing the bacteria. This can occur when they eat or drink contaminated food or water. The bacteria may also be passed from the infected stool or unclean fingers of one person to the hands and mouth of another person. The spread of the *Shigella* bacteria occurs when persons have poor handwashing habits.

### What are the symptoms of shigellosis?

Some people may not have symptoms, but may still pass the *Shigella* bacteria to others. Symptoms of shigellosis usually occur 1 to 7 days after swallowing the bacteria and include:

- Watery diarrhea (which may contain blood or mucus)
- Fever
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal cramps

### How is shigellosis diagnosed?

If a health care provider suspects shigellosis, samples of the patient's stool will be examined.

### Can people with shigellosis pass the illness to others?

Infected people may spread shigellosis to others as long as the *Shigella* bacteria are in their stool.

### What is the treatment for shigellosis?

Most people who become ill with shigellosis recover on their own within a week. Severe cases of shigellosis may be treated with antibiotics. These antibiotics kill the *Shigella* bacteria in the stool and help to shorten the illness. Unfortunately, some *Shigella* bacteria are resistant to antibiotics. (NOTE: it is very important to finish your antibiotics even if you begin to feel better, unless otherwise directed by a health care provider.)

Anti-diarrheal remedies are likely to make the illness worse and should not be taken.

## **Should a person infected with shigellosis be excluded from work or school?**

Most infected people may return to work or school when they no longer have diarrhea and fever. Since the *Shigella* bacteria may continue to be in their stool for several weeks, infected people should wash their hands with soap and water, especially after every bathroom visit.

Special precautions are indicated for food handlers, health care workers, child care providers and children attending child care. If these people are infected with the bacteria, they may put others at risk for the illness.

- Food handlers should be excluded from cooking, preparing and touching food until they have no symptoms and have two negative stool tests.
- Health care workers should be excluded from direct patient care/contact until they have no symptoms and have two negative stool tests.
- Child care providers and/or child attendees should be excluded from work/attending child care until they have no symptoms and have two negative stool tests. Stools of all child care staff, attendees and household contacts with diarrhea should be tested.

Please note: Two negative stool tests should be taken at least 24 hours apart and at least 48 hours after antibiotic treatment has ended (if antibiotic therapy is given).

## **What can be done to prevent shigellosis?**

- Wash hands completely with soap and water before preparing food, eating and feeding children/patients.
- Carefully wash hands after changing diapers and using the toilet.
- Disinfect the diaper changing area after each use.
- Anyone who has diarrhea, should not swim in a pool, ocean or pond.
- When traveling to developing countries, drink only treated or boiled water and eat only cooked foods and fruits you peel yourself.

## **Where can I get more information?**

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department
- NJ Department of Health [www.nj.gov/health](http://www.nj.gov/health)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation with a health care professional. Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.