



Shigellosis

What is Shigellosis?

Shigellosis is an enteric disease caused by *Shigella* bacteria. When ingested, these bacteria are capable of causing illness in humans.

How is it spread?

Shigella infections are very contagious and spread very easily. Swallowing a small amount of these bacteria can make you sick.

People who are infected with *Shigella* pass the bacteria in their stool and may contaminate food, drink, surfaces and objects that you come into contact with every day. Examples include: door handles, light switches and restroom surfaces.

An infected food handler who does not properly wash their hands may contaminate foods during preparation or serving. Fruits and vegetables can become contaminated if they are harvested from a field where contaminated sewage was used to grow the produce.

You may also be exposed to the bacteria if you are in direct contact with the stool of an infected person and then do not wash your hands thoroughly. For example, changing diapers of children or seniors. Some sexual activities may expose you to *Shigella* bacteria. The bacteria can also be ingested by drinking or swimming in contaminated water.

What are the symptoms?

Most people experience watery diarrhea (that may have blood in it), fever, nausea, vomiting and stomach cramps. Usually, you will begin to feel these symptoms about 1 to 3 days after you are exposed to the bacteria.

Certain types of *Shigella* bacteria may cause more severe illness, especially in young children, the elderly or those with weakened immune systems.

In a mild case of Shigellosis you will start to feel better within 4 to 7 days, without taking any medication. In more severe cases, medication may be necessary.

What is the treatment for Shigellosis?

Consulting your health care provider is recommended as they may suggest antibiotics or treatment to help with the symptoms.

Antibiotics may help you recover quicker and may also shorten the length of time that bacteria remains in your stool. This could also lower the risk of spreading your illness to others.

How do I protect myself and others?

- Wash your hands before and after using the toilet, before preparing or eating meals, and after changing diapers or helping individuals with toileting.
- Wash fresh fruits and vegetables thoroughly with clean running water to remove any bacteria present.
- Drink only pasteurized milk
- Drink water from an approved, tested or chemically treated source. If you are unsure of the safety of your water supply boil your water for 1 minute, or use an approved disinfectant.
- Take precautions when travelling in countries where hygiene and sanitation may be inadequate.
 - Make sure fresh fruits and vegetables have been washed with clean water or peel them yourself prior to eating.
 - When eating cooked foods, make sure they are still hot when they are served.
 - Avoid beverages or ice that may have been prepared with untreated water.

Are there any special concerns about Shigellosis?

If you have *Shigellosis*, and you are a food handler, healthcare, child care worker or a caregiver, you should not go to work while you are having symptoms. In addition, you may have to stop working until a stool sample or rectal swab confirms the bacteria is no longer present. It is possible that even after you are feeling better you may still have bacteria in your stool for a period of time. To prevent spreading the disease to people around you, always practice good hand washing and maintain personal hygiene.

Call the Communicable Disease Team: ext. 8809



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