



SHIGELLOSIS

What is SHIGELLOSIS?

Shigellosis is a fairly common bacterial infection which affects the intestines. It is caused by the bacterium *Shigella*.

Who gets shigellosis?

Anyone can get shigellosis, but it is diagnosed more often in young children. At greatest risk are children in daycare centers, travelers to certain foreign countries, institutionalized people, and active homosexuals.

How is *Shigella* bacteria spread?

Shigella bacteria are found in the intestines and feces of infected people who may contaminate food or water. This happens if the infected person does not wash their hands properly after using the toilet and then handles food that other people will eat. The bacteria are spread by direct contact with feces from an infected person, by eating or drinking contaminated food or water, or by contact with a contaminated object. Direct contact may unintentionally happen when diapering children, for example.

What are the symptoms?

People infected with the *Shigella* bacteria may have mild or severe diarrhea (often with traces of blood or mucous), abdominal cramping, fever, nausea, and vomiting. Some infected people may not show any symptoms.

How soon do symptoms appear?

The symptoms usually appear 1-3 days after exposure and usually last for 5-7 days.

When and for how long is a person able to spread shigellosis?

People with shigellosis may be able to spread the disease even after they are well. Most people pass the *Shigella* bacteria in their feces for 1-2 weeks. Sometimes people continue to pass the bacteria for as long as six weeks, called the 'carrier' phase. Appropriate antibiotic treatment usually reduces the carrier phase to a few days.

Should infected people be excluded from school or work?

Most infected people can return to work or school when their diarrhea stops if they carefully wash their hands after using the restroom. People with diarrhea need to be excluded from daycare, food service or any other group activity where they may present a risk to others. Food handlers; children and staff in daycare settings, and health care workers should not work or attend daycare until two negative stool specimens are obtained.

How is shigellosis treated?

Most people with shigellosis recover without treatment. Some may require fluids to prevent dehydration. Antibiotics are sometimes used to treat severe cases or to shorten the carrier phase. This may allow food handlers, health care employees, children and staff in daycare settings, and institutionalized individuals to return sooner to their routine activities.

What can be done to prevent the spread of shigellosis?

Since *Shigella* bacteria are passed in the feces, the single most important way to prevent the disease is careful handwashing, including under fingernails, after using the toilet, after diapering, and before preparing food.