

Shigellosis- Factsheet

What is *shigella*?

When your doctor says that you have ‘shigella’, the doctor means that you have an intestinal or stomach infection with bacteria called *Shigella*.

What are the symptoms of *shigella* infection?

The most common symptoms of *Shigella* infection are diarrhea, abdominal pain, fever, severe cramping and vomiting. The stool (feces) may also contain blood and/or mucus. Most people with shigellosis feel better after a week of illness. The symptoms usually appear within 1 to 3 days after exposure. Some infected people do not have any symptoms.

How is *shigella* spread?

Shigella is present in stools of infected persons while they are sick and for up to four weeks afterwards. An infected person may “dirty” or contaminate food or water. For example, infected persons can spread *Shigella* by not washing their hands after going to the bathroom and then handling food that other people will eat. Another way to get shigellosis is by direct oral contact with feces from an infected person. This could unintentionally happen while diapering children. *Shigella* infections can also be acquired by drinking or swimming in contaminated water. Water may become contaminated if sewage runs into it, or if someone with *Shigella* infection swims in it.

How long are people contagious?

People infected with shigellosis can spread the bacteria from the moment they begin feeling ill and for up to four weeks afterwards.

Who gets shigellosis?

Anyone can become infected with these bacteria. Because there are many different strains of *Shigella*, shigellosis can re-occur throughout a person’s lifetime.

What treatment is available for people with shigellosis?

Most *Shigella* infections will go away without treatment. However, there are some instances where your health care provider may recommend treatment with antibiotics to make you feel better sooner and shorten the time *Shigella* are present in your stool. As multidrug-resistant *Shigella* is on the rise and *Shigella* is usually self-limiting, healthcare providers may postpone antibiotic therapy. It is important to notify your provider if your symptoms last longer than expected.

Do infected people need to be kept home from school, work or daycare?

Since the bacteria is found in stool, children should not go to daycare or school while they have diarrhea and food handlers should be excluded from work. Day care attendees and food handlers may return to day care or work after two negative stool culture results.

How can I protect myself and my family from getting *shigella*?

You can decrease your chance of coming in contact with *Shigella* by the following practices:

- Wash hands frequently with water and soap, and especially after using the toilet,

changing a diaper or before preparing and/or eating food. (Sanitizing gel may be substituted when hands are not visibly soiled.)

- Promptly disinfect contaminated surfaces with household chlorine bleach-based cleaners.
- Wash soiled clothing and linens.
- Avoid food or water from sources that may be contaminated.