

Infectious Disease Factsheet

Shigellosis

Shigellosis is a bacterial disease caused by infection with *Shigella* bacteria. It causes diarrhoea and is easily spread among people. Good hygiene is the key to prevention.

What is Shigellosis?

Shigellosis is a diarrhoeal disease caused by infection with *Shigella* bacteria.

What are the symptoms?

Infection with *Shigella* usually results in diarrhoea, fever, nausea, vomiting, and stomach cramps. The stool may often have blood or mucus in it. The symptoms begin 1-7 days (usually 1-3 days) after exposure. Symptoms usually last 4-7 days but sometimes longer.

How is it spread?

Shigellosis is passed from person to person by the faecal-oral route, by direct or indirect contact with faecal material. This commonly occurs if hands are not washed properly, particularly after going to the toilet or changing nappies, and as a result of sexual contact. *Shigella* infections may also be acquired from eating food contaminated with the bacteria. Flies can also carry *Shigella* and can contaminate food.

A person can have *Shigella* present in their stools for some weeks and have no symptoms, and still pass on infection to others.

How is it prevented?

To prevent shigellosis:

- thoroughly wash vegetables and fruit that is eaten raw
- thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water for at least 10 seconds
 - after going to the toilet

- after changing nappies
- after any exposures to faecal material
- before handling food or caring for other people.

People with shigellosis should avoid work and should not prepare food or care for others while they are sick. Sick children, particularly those in nappies, should be kept home from childcare for 24 hours after diarrhoea has ceased. Children and adults should avoid swimming until diarrhoea has stopped.

People who work as food handlers or who care for children or the elderly should not return to their duties for 48 hours after diarrhoea has stopped.

For further information please contact your local public health unit, community health centre, or doctor.

Who is at risk?

Shigellosis can affect anyone; however, children, people with poor immune systems, and the elderly are at the greatest risk.

How is it diagnosed?

Diagnosis of shigellosis requires the isolation of *Shigella* bacteria from a stool specimen. Your doctor may order this test if you have symptoms.

How is it treated?

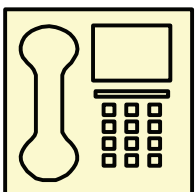
People with mild infections will usually recover without treatment. Drinking increased amounts of fluid is important to avoid dehydration. Young children (particularly infants) are susceptible to dehydration from diarrhoea, and parents should seek medical attention.

Antibiotics, can be used to treat severe *Shigella* infections, however, some *Shigella* have become resistant to antibiotics.

What is the public health response?

Laboratories are required to notify cases of *Shigella* to the local Public Health Unit. Where clusters are identified, the public health unit staff will interview cases and their carers and try to identify and control a common source of infection.

Further information - Public Health Units in NSW



1300 066 055

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