

Shigellosis

FACT SHEET

What is shigellosis?

Shigellosis is an infection caused by a family of bacteria called *Shigella*. These microscopic living creatures infect the intestines and are passed easily from person to person by contaminated hands, food, water or surfaces. There are several different kinds of *Shigella*, but Group D *Shigella* accounts for more than 2/3 of the cases of shigellosis in the US.

Who can get shigellosis?

Anyone can get shigellosis, but it is most commonly recognized in children, especially toddlers two to four years old. People who live in unsanitary conditions, people in institutions, men having sex with men and travelers abroad are also at increased risk for being infected with *Shigella*.

How is shigellosis spread?

Shigella bacteria are found in the intestines and stool of infected people. Most *Shigella* infections occur when the bacterium passes from the stool or dirty hands of one person to the mouth of another person. People who are infected and don't wash their hands well after using the bathroom can contaminate surfaces, food or water that another person may come into contact with. Shigellosis can also be spread by getting contaminated swimming water in your mouth or during certain kinds of sexual activity.

What are the symptoms of shigellosis?

Common symptoms of shigellosis include fever, vomiting, abdominal cramps, nausea and diarrhea, which may be bloody or contain mucous. Symptoms usually begin one to three days after being exposed to the bacteria, and may last up to seven days. Some people may not show any symptoms, but they can still pass the bacteria on to other people.

How long is a person contagious when they have shigellosis?

Most people will pass the bacteria in their stool for one to two weeks. Some people may pass it as long as six weeks. People may be able to spread the illness even after their symptoms go away.

What should a person do if they have shigellosis?

Most people who have shigellosis will recover on their own. In some cases, fluids are needed to prevent dehydration, and a person's health care provider may also prescribe an antibiotic to shorten the contagious period of the illness. Hospitalization is rarely needed, but severe shigellosis infection with a high fever may cause seizures in children less than two years old.

Anyone who has diarrhea should stay home from school, daycare, food service or any other group activity where they may pose a risk to other people. Most people can return to activities after they have been without diarrhea for at least 24 hours. Children, daycare workers, food handlers and health care staff must get approval from the state or local health department before returning to school, daycare or work. As they return to routine activities, people who have had shigellosis should continue to wash their hands regularly and carefully.

What is the best way to protect myself against shigellosis?

The single most effective way to protect yourself from shigellosis is with frequent, careful handwashing. Always wash your hands after using the bathroom or changing a child's diaper. Always wash your hands before handling food, eating or drinking. Use soap and running water and rub your hands together vigorously for at least 20 seconds, being sure to clean under the fingernails and in between your fingers. Rinse with running water and use a disposable towel to dry your hands, turn off the faucet and open the bathroom door.