



Shigellosis

What is shigellosis?

Shigella are bacteria that cause a stomach infection referred to as shigellosis, or “bacillary dysentery”. The bacteria are usually only found in infected people, their stools or their bowel movements.

Who can get shigellosis?

Anyone who has contact with an infected stool can get shigellosis. It can be spread in day care settings with young children, especially toddlers 2 to 4 years of age who are not fully toilet trained or have poor hygiene. It also can be spread in contaminated food or water, among people with poor hygiene or those living in unsanitary conditions, especially those in developing countries. Men who have sex with men are at higher risk due to high rates of infection.

What are the symptoms of shigellosis?

The symptoms of shigellosis include fever, diarrhea (sometimes containing blood and/or mucous), stomach cramps, nausea and vomiting.

Symptoms usually occur 1 to 3 days after exposure. A person with shigellosis may experience mild, severe or no symptoms. If you have serious symptoms you should see your doctor. In most cases it takes 5 to 7 days to get better, but it can sometimes take longer. Some people with severe symptoms may need to stay in the hospital, especially very young children, seniors 65 years and older and people with poor immune systems.

How does shigellosis spread?

Shigellosis is very infectious and spreads easily. Because the bacteria are in the stool of an infected person, infection occurs when tiny bits of infected stool get in another person’s mouth, food or water.

Here are the most common ways that shigellosis spreads:

Being exposed to infected stool or objects contaminated with stool

- Commonly in day care centres if you do not wash your hands often when you are touching children and changing diapers.

Contaminated food or water

- When food is contaminated by infected handlers
- When sanitation and hygiene are poor
- In developing countries without proper drinking water treatment
- Swimming at beaches with contaminated water

Sexual contact

- Through oral-anal (mouth to anus) contact (see HealthLink BC File [#08n Shigella – an Enteric STD](#))
- By getting stool onto fingers and then touching your mouth
- By putting food or objects that may have tiny bits of stool on them into your mouth

How can you prevent shigellosis?

Exposure to infected stool

- Frequent and careful hand washing is important for everybody. Make sure children have their hands washed properly in day care centers and at home. This is especially important for children who are not completely toilet-trained, including children in diapers.
- When possible, a young child with a shigella infection should not be around or play with other children.

Contaminated food or water

- Basic food safety precautions and drinking water treatment help prevent shigellosis (see HealthLink BC File [#59a Food Safety: Ten Easy Steps to Make Food Safe](#)).

- At swimming pools or beaches, having enough bathrooms near the swimming area helps keep the water from becoming contaminated.
- Eat only cooked hot foods or fruits you peel yourself (see HealthLink BC File [#41e Traveller's Diarrhea](#)).
- Drink only treated or boiled water.

When having sex

- Do not have unprotected oral-anal contact.
- Right after sex, thoroughly wash your hands and other body parts that may have touched stool. Use warm running water and soap.

Wash your hands often!

- Wash all parts of your hands well rubbing them together to create lather. Include the backs of your hands and wrists.
- Clean under your nails and keep them short.
- Dry hands with a fresh paper towel or a clean cloth towel.
- Be aware of ways that tiny bits of stool can get into your mouth. These include:
 - Biting your nails;
 - Lighting up a cigarette;
 - Eating unwrapped candy, nuts, chips, fruit or other food; and
 - Sharing cups, bottles, utensils, plates or other household items.

If you have shigellosis how can you avoid giving it to others?

- Wash your hands well and often with soap and water. This is important for all age groups, especially after having a bowel movement, changing diapers, and before preparing foods or drinks.
- Watch children when they wash their hands, and help them as needed. This is really important for children who are not completely toilet-trained, including children in diapers.
- Get rid of dirty diapers properly.
- Disinfect diaper changing areas with diluted household bleach (2 tablespoons bleach per gallon water, or 60 ml bleach per 4 litres water).

- Children with shigellosis must be kept out of day care centers until they are no longer infected.
- People who handle food, or who care for children, the sick, the elderly, or other dependents, cannot go to work until they have shown that they have cleared the infection (*See the Communicable Disease Control Manual – “Exclusion of Enteric Cases and their Contacts from High Risk Settings”* at <http://www.bccdc.ca/dis-cond/comm-manual/CDManualChap1.htm>).
- Do not have unprotected oral-anal sex for at least 7 days after your symptoms have stopped.

When should you see a doctor?

You should see a doctor if you have the symptoms of shigellosis, especially if blood is present in your stools.

What is the treatment for shigellosis?

- People with shigellosis can be treated with antibiotics to speed recovery and to help prevent others from getting infected. However, people with mild symptoms generally recover without any antibiotic treatment.
- If you have diarrhea, drink lots of fluids to avoid dehydration.
- See your family doctor or health care provider.



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