

# Shigellosis

## What is shigellosis?

Shigellosis is a disease caused by bacteria called Shigella. Most people infected with Shigella develop diarrhea (often bloody diarrhea), fever, and stomach cramps a day or two after being exposed to the bacteria, these symptoms usually last 5 to 7 days. In some persons, especially young children and the elderly, the diarrhea can be so severe that the patient needs medical attention. Some persons who are infected may have no symptoms at all, but may still pass the Shigella bacteria to others.

## How are people exposed to Shigella?

The Shigella bacteria is often passed through the fecal-oral route, meaning, the bacteria is passed from stools or unwashed fingers of one person to the mouth of another person. This happens when basic hygiene and hand washing habits are inadequate. It is particularly likely to occur among toddlers who are not fully toilet-trained. Family members and playmates of such children are at high risk of becoming infected. Shigella bacteria remain in the feces of sick people and for a week or two afterwards. Shigella infections may also be acquired from drinking contaminated water or eating contaminated food. Contaminated food may look and smell normal, but may have become contaminated by infected food handlers who forgot to wash their hands with soap after using the bathroom. Vegetables can become contaminated if they are harvested from a field with sewage in it.

## How can a person prevent this illness?

There is no vaccine to prevent shigellosis. Good hygiene and a few basic precautions can help prevent illness.

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- Wash hands with soap carefully and frequently, especially after going to the bathroom, after changing diapers, and before preparing foods or beverages
- Dispose of soiled diapers properly
- Disinfect diaper changing areas after using them
- Keep children with diarrhea out of child care settings
- When possible, young children with a Shigella infection who are still in diapers should not be in contact with uninfected children.
- Supervise hand washing of toddlers and small children after using the toilet
- Persons with diarrhea should not prepare food or pour water for others until they are shown to be free of the bacteria
- If you are traveling to a developing country drink only treated or boiled water and only eat cooked hot foods or fruits you peel yourself.
- Avoid drinking pool water
- Do not allow children with diarrhea in wading or other pools

## How is Shigella infection diagnosed and treated?

Many different kinds of diseases can cause diarrhea, even bloody diarrhea. Determining that Shigella is the cause of the illness depends on laboratory tests that identify the Shigella bacteria in the stools of an infected person. Shigellosis can be treated with antibiotics. The appropriate antibiotic treatment kills the Shigella bacteria present in the patient's stools, and shortens the illness. Unfortunately, some Shigella bacteria have become resistant to many antibiotics so using the appropriate antibiotics and not over-using antibiotic treatment is important to controlling the bacteria. Most persons with mild infections will usually recover quickly without

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antibiotics. However, children are at particular risk of complications from dehydration caused by diarrhea and should see a doctor particularly if they do not recover within a week or are in daycare.

## **Are there long term consequences to a Shigella infection?**

Persons with diarrhea usually recover completely, although it may be several months before their bowel habits are entirely normal. About 3% of persons who are infected with one type of Shigella will later develop Reiter's syndrome- pains in their joints, irritation of the eyes, and painful urination.

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