

Shigellosis

Public Health – Factsheet

What is shigellosis?

Shigellosis is a sudden intestinal* illness caused by the bacteria, or germ, Shigella.

What are the symptoms of shigellosis?

A person can have a range of symptoms from none at all, to very severe. Symptoms of shigellosis can include diarrhea (watery and sometimes with blood and/or mucous), fever and nausea. It can also include stomach cramps, vomiting and toxemia (poisons in the blood).

When do the symptoms start and how long do they last?

Symptoms usually start one to three days after a person has become infected with the germ. They usually go away in four to seven days. However, malnourished children, seniors and those with weakened immune systems (ex: patients living with HIV or cancer, transplant patients receiving immunosuppressant drugs) are more at risk for serious illness.

What causes shigellosis?

Most Shigella infections are caused by bacteria, or germs, passing from the stool (poop) or soiled fingers of one person to the mouth of another person, when cleanliness and personal hygiene are poor. Shigellosis is very infectious and spreads easily from person to person.

How is shigellosis spread?

People can have the germ passed on to them:

- in daycare centres, if hands are not washed each time diapers are changed
- by eating food contaminated by food handlers (ex: cooks, meat-cutters), or by flies picking up the bacteria from outside bathrooms
- by drinking water contaminated by the stool of infected animals or people (ex: water in under-developed countries that has not been treated properly)
- swimming at beaches with contaminated water
- having oral-anal (mouth to anus) sexual contact

What should you do if you think you have shigellosis?

If you think you have shigellosis, you should see your doctor for testing, advice and treatment.

How is shigellosis diagnosed?

You have the disease when Shigella bacteria is found in your stool. A stool sample must be sent to a lab which uses special techniques to grow and identify the bacteria.

How is the infection treated?

People who have a mild illness usually get better quickly without any treatment. Your doctor will decide if treatment is necessary in your particular case. People with shigellosis should drink plenty of clear fluids (ex: water, clear juices, soups) to prevent dehydration, or water loss, caused by the diarrhea. Resting and eating foods that are easy to digest (ex: bananas, rice, crackers) will help recovery. The use of over-the-counter medicine to stop diarrhea (ex: Immodium) is **not** recommended.

How can I protect myself from shigellosis?

Since shigellosis is spread by the fecal-oral route, here are some ways to reduce your chances of getting the infection.

- Wash your hands with soap and water before and after using the toilet, changing diapers, and eating or preparing food.
 - **NOTE:** This is especially important in daycare centres.
- Practice safe food handling. (Make sure your hands, and the work surface, are clean when handling food.)
- Control flies in areas where you are handling food. (Keep them out, if possible.)
- Store and refrigerate food properly.
- Make sure your drinking water is safe. This includes water that is bottled, treated or boiled.

* illness of the stomach and/or bowels

Shigellosis

- When travelling to places where the water supply may be unsafe, avoid drinks with ice.
- Avoid sexual practices that could put you at risk of getting the infection.

Consider Others

Don't pass it on.

If I become infected, how can I avoid passing on shigellosis to others?

All people with shigellosis should wash their hands often. This is especially important after going to the toilet and before handling food. It is important to realize that others can get sick from you.

If you are sick with shigellosis, you should not use public water for recreation (ex: swimming pools, water parks) or share a bath with others, until you are feeling better. While you are sick, stop any sexual practices that could spread the infection to your partner.

Are there certain jobs where the bacteria can be passed on more easily than others?

Yes. If you work in a job that involves food handling or close contact with others (ex: kitchens or restaurants, hospitals, daycares, personal care homes) and you become ill with shigellosis, you should stop working while you have diarrhea and vomiting.

You should not go back to work until symptoms are gone, and you have tested negative for *Shigella* in two stool samples, collected 24 hours apart. This time period will give you a chance to recover and reduce the risk of passing the infection on to others.

What about daycare? If my child becomes infected with shigellosis, can I send him/her anyway?

If your child has shigellosis, it is recommended that he/she not go to daycare. If this is not possible, the child should be cared for in a separate area of the daycare until the diarrhea has stopped.

For more information

Talk to your doctor or other health care provider, your local public health unit, or call Health Links-Info Santé at 204-788-8200 in Winnipeg; or toll free 1-888-315-9257 outside Winnipeg.

Information is also available on the Manitoba Health website at www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/protocol/shigellosis.pdf.