

SHIGELLOSIS FACTSHEET

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What is Shigellosis?

Shigellosis is an infection caused by bacteria called Shigella. These bacteria infect the intestinal tract and cause diarrheal illness.

Who gets Shigellosis?

Anyone can get Shigellosis, but children, especially toddlers aged 2-4, are most likely to get the disease. Shigellosis is more common in the summer than the winter.

What are the symptoms of Shigellosis?

The symptoms of Shigellosis include fever, abdominal cramps, and diarrhea. The diarrhea is often bloody.

How is Shigellosis spread?

Shigella infections can occur when the bacteria is passed in the stool or on the soiled hands of one person to another person. Shigella can also be acquired by eating contaminated food or drinking or swimming in contaminated water. Contamination of food occurs most frequently as the result of infected food handlers not washing their hands. However, vegetables can become contaminated if they are harvested from a field with sewage in it. Water can become contaminated if sewage runs into it or if someone with Shigellosis swims in it.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms generally begin within 1-3 days after being exposed.

Is a person with Shigellosis contagious?

A person is contagious as long as Shigella can be found in their stool. Good personal hygiene is very important to prevent the spread of this disease if you are infected.

How is Shigellosis treated?

Shigellosis can be treated with several different antibiotics. The antibiotic kills the Shigella that is present in the stool and shortens the illness. Persons with mild infections will usually recover quickly without antibiotic treatment. Anti-diarrheal drugs are

likely to make the illness worse and should be avoided.

Should a person with Shigellosis be excluded from work or school?

People with active diarrhea who are unable to control their bowel movements (infants, young children, certain handicapped individuals, etc.) should be excluded from settings such as day care or group activities where they may present a risk to others. Most infected people may return to work or school when their stools become formed provided that they carefully wash their hands after using the bathroom. Food handlers, health-care providers, and children in day care must obtain approval of the DC Department of Health before returning to work or school.

Can Shigellosis be prevented?

The following steps will decrease your risk of becoming ill or spreading Shigellosis:

- Frequent hand washing with soap especially before and after preparing food or beverages, after using the bathroom, and after changing diapers;
- Ensure children wash their hands before meals and after using the bathroom;
- Dispose of soiled diapers properly and wash hands thoroughly
- Persons with diarrheal illness should not prepare food for others
- If you are traveling to a developing country, with regards to food and water: "boil it, cook it, peel it or forget it"
- Avoid drinking pool water

Want more information?

Information about Shigellosis and other related health topics can be found at the website www.cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please call (202) 442-9371.

