

SHIGELLOSIS (shi-gell-O-sis)

What Is Shigellosis?

Shigellosis is an infectious disease caused by a group of bacteria called *Shigella*. The disease itself is commonly referred to as dysentery. People are the only source for *Shigella* bacteria. *Shigella* are extremely infectious bacteria, and ingestion of just 10 organisms is enough to cause symptoms.

Symptoms and Duration: Most people who are infected with *Shigella* develop diarrhea, fever and stomach cramps starting a day or two after they are exposed to the bacteria. The diarrhea is often bloody. Illness usually resolves in 5 to 7 days. Some individuals may have only mild infection or no symptoms at all. Illness is normally self-limiting, lasting an average of 4-7 days. In some cases the symptoms can be quite severe and last for several days or weeks.

Incubation Period: Symptoms can occur 12-96 hours after ingesting the bacteria.

Recovery, Long Term Effects & Immunity: Disease is sometimes more severe in children than it is in adults and in some cases there is an association with Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS), a leading cause of kidney failure in both young children and the elderly. Symptoms of HUS include irritability, fatigue, paleness of the skin, puffiness around the eyes and ankles, and decreased urine production. Anyone can become ill with shigellosis but the elderly, malnourished and young children are considered to have an increased susceptibility.

How Is Shigellosis Spread?

Shigella lives in the intestines of infected people. The bacteria pass from one infected person to the next. Most *Shigella* infections are the result of the bacterium passing from stools or soiled hands of one person to the mouth of another person (fecal-oral transmission). It takes so few organisms to cause illness therefore person-to-person spread between family members is common. *Shigella* infections can be acquired from eating contaminated food or drinking polluted water. Food may become contaminated when infected food handlers do not wash their hands properly after using the bathroom. Water may become contaminated if sewage runs into it. Vegetables irrigated with contaminated water and shellfish harvested from contaminated water may also spread *Shigella* bacteria. Flies can spread disease by being in contact with infected feces and then landing on uncovered food.

How Do You Prevent Shigellosis Infection?

- **Thorough hand washing is the best prevention.** Make sure hands are washed after using the toilet and changing diapers and before handling and eating foods.
- Infected people should not work as food handlers or care providers until they are clear.
- Drink water from a safe supply. When traveling use bottled water or boil the water for at least 5 minutes if the water supply is unknown. Remember that ice cubes can also be contaminated. Avoid swimming in water that may be contaminated.
- Avoid eating raw shellfish harvested from unknown sources.
- Protect food against flies and cockroaches.
- Wash all fruits and vegetables before use.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT
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