

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET



COUNTY MICHIGAN
HEALTH DIVISION

Department of Health & Human Services

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Shigella

What is Shigella?

Shigella is a bacterial germ that causes illness when it gets into the intestines.

What are the symptoms of Shigella?

- stomach ache
- fever
- diarrhea (three or more loose stools in 24 hours) that may contain blood, pus and mucus
- constant pressure to have a bowel movement

Symptoms may be more severe in children than adults.

How is it spread?

People spread it to others when they do not wash their hands after using the bathroom or changing the diaper of a child with this illness. The germ is found in a person's stool (bowel movement). This is one of the easiest germs to give to others because it only takes a few germs to make you sick.

What should I do if I have these symptoms?

The only way to find out if you have this germ is to see your doctor. You may be asked to bring a sample of your bowel movement (stool). It will be checked for the Shigella germ. If you do have Shigella, the doctor may ask other family members to be checked for the germ.

What is the treatment for Shigella?

Your doctor may give you medicine to take. Make sure you use all the medicine as prescribed. **Do not stop taking the medicine even if you feel better.** If you stop taking the medicine you may still have the germ inside you. Your doctor will want to check another stool sample after you have finished the medicine to make sure that you are cured. Avoid big meals. It is important to continue drinking liquids like clear juices, broth, Jell-O, tea or pop until symptoms go away.

How long will the infection last?

From the beginning of symptoms until the bacteria is no longer present in the intestine, which is about four weeks. May last longer in infants.

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How can I guard against the spread of Shigella?

If you have the germ:

- **Wash your hands** after using the bathroom.
- **Wash your hands** before and after preparing food.
- **Wash your hands** before eating.
- **Wash your hands** after changing diapers. Be sure to wash the child's hands, too.

If your child has the germ:

- **Wash your hands and their hands** after changing diapers.
- **Wash** soiled diapers (cloth), sheets or clothing in hot soapy water and dry in a dryer.
- **Seal** disposable diapers in a plastic bag and put in a tightly closed garbage can (this helps keep animals from scattering the soiled items and possibly spreading the germ to others).
- **Do not** allow contact with other children outside the family until your child is cured.

What are the complications of Shigella?

- Shigella can lead to serious problems if not treated. In some cases, the diarrhea can lead to loss of body fluids. This dehydration (loss of water) can be a problem, so it is important that people with Shigella (especially babies and small children) continue to drink fluids. Shigella can cause serious bowel (intestine) changes, which may need to be treated.
- Infected food service workers, direct patient care workers or day care workers who work with food or diapering should be off work until they are no longer infected.
- Outbreaks can be common in crowded areas or under poor sanitary conditions.

How is Shigella prevented?

Good hygiene is the best way to prevent this disease.

- **Wash your hands often and properly.**
- **Teach your children how to wash their hands.**
(See Public Health Fact Sheet - Handwashing)
- **Keep your bathroom clean.** Use a freshly prepared 1:100 dilution of common household bleach (approximately 3 cup bleach per gallon of tap water).

*NOTE: Surfaces **must** be precleaned with detergent and water before using a bleach solution. Use bleach solution and let air dry.*

(Adapted from Washtenaw County Department of Human Services/Public Health Division)

For more information on Shigella, call (248) 858-1406 or toll free 1 (800) 848-5533.

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