
Shigella

What You Need to Know



What is Shigella?

Shigella is a diarrheal illness caused by a group of bacteria. Shigella can be found in contaminated water sources such as untreated wading pools and splash fountains. It can also be spread through direct person to person contact or from eating contaminated food.

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 Shigella spread?

Shigella is found in a person's stool (bowel movement). It is easily spread by people who do not wash their hands after using the bathroom or changing the diaper of a child with this illness. This is one of the easiest illnesses to give to others because it only takes a few bacteria to make you sick. Food may become contaminated by infected food handlers who forget 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. Outbreaks are common in crowded areas or under poor sanitary conditions.

Is there a treatment for Shigella?

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

A person is contagious from the beginning of symptoms until the bacteria are no longer present in the intestine, usually 7 - 14 days. It may last longer in infants. Do not allow your child contact with other children outside the family until your child is better.

How can Shigella be prevented?

- If your child has Shigella your doctor may tell you to keep your child away from other children until the infection clears.
- Do not swim if you are experiencing diarrhea and for 1 week after diarrhea stops. This is especially important for children.
- Infected food service, patient care, or day care workers should be off work until they are no longer infected.
- Wash your hands after using the bathroom.
- Wash your hands before and after preparing food.
- Wash your hands before eating.
- Wash your hands and the child's hands after changing diapers.
- Wash soiled diapers (cloth), sheets or clothing in hot soapy water and dry in clothes 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 bacteria to others.
- Keep your bathroom and diaper changing area clean. Use a freshly prepared 1:100 dilution of common household bleach, approximately 2 teaspoons of bleach for 1 cup(s) of water. Surfaces must be pre-cleaned with detergent and water before using a bleach solution. Use bleach solution and let air dry.
- Cook meat well before eating it. Put cooked meat into the refrigerator right after a meal. Don't leave it on the counter to cool off.
- Wash and/or peel all raw vegetables and fruits before eating.
- Do not drink untreated water from shallow wells, lakes, ponds, rivers and streams.

Are there complications?

Rarely Shigella leads to serious problems. In some cases, the diarrhea can lead to excessive loss of body fluids (dehydration). It is important for people with Shigella (especially babies and small children) to drink plenty of fluids. Few cases of Shigella may cause serious bowel (intestine) changes, needing treatment by a doctor.



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