



Shigellosis

What is shigellosis?

Shigellosis is an infectious disease caused by a group of bacteria called *Shigella*. This illness is commonly called dysentery. Anyone can get shigellosis, but it occurs more often in the following groups:

- Children in child care centres
- Travellers to certain countries
- People living in institutions
- Individuals who engage in sexual practices that may permit fecal-oral transmission

Feces of infected humans are the source of infection. *Shigella* are extremely infectious bacteria and it can take only 10 to 100 organism to cause illness.

What are the symptoms of shigellosis?

Shigella cause diarrhea (often bloody), accompanied by fever, nausea and sometimes vomiting and stomach cramps. Seizures can occur. Convulsions may be an important complication in young children.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear one to three days after ingesting the bacteria, but may appear from 12 to 96 hours afterwards. Symptoms last for an average of four to seven days, but in some cases can be quite severe and can last for several days or weeks.

The disease is more severe in children than it is in adults. It is associated with Haemolytic Uraemic Syndrome (HUS), a leading cause of kidney failure in the elderly and young children. Symptoms of HUS include irritability, fatigue, paleness of the skin, puffiness around the eyes and ankles, and a decrease in the amount of urine produced.

How does shigellosis spread?

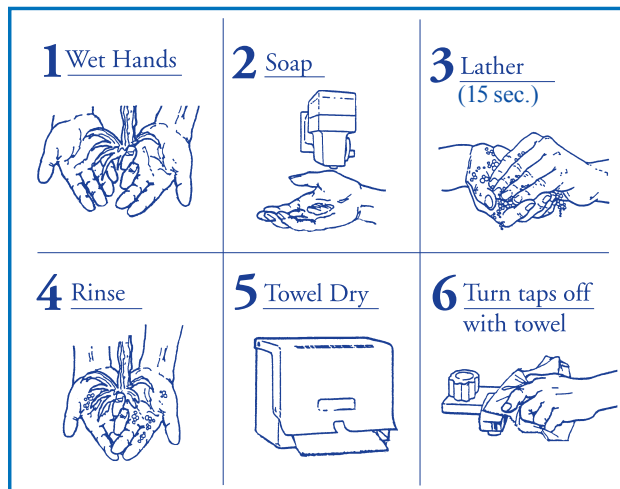
Shigella bacteria are found in the intestines of infected people and are passed in their feces (stool). Most people continue to pass *Shigella* for one to two weeks after their symptoms have stopped, but in some cases, they can pass the bacteria for up to four weeks after illness.

Shigellosis can develop after ingesting contaminated food or water, or through person-to-person spread, which is common between family members. Flies may also transfer the organism on their feet after being in contact with infected feces and then landing on uncovered food left at room temperature. Outside of the body, *Shigella* survive for only a short period.

For further information, please call:
York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653
TTY 1-866-252-9933 or visit www.york.ca

How can shigellosis be prevented?

- Thorough hand washing is the best prevention. Wash hands carefully with soap and water, using the 6-step method (see diagram), before preparing or eating food, after changing diapers, and after using the toilet



- Infected people should not work as food handlers or provide daycare until they are *Shigella*-free
- Drink water from a safe supply. Boil water to a rolling boil for one minute or drink bottled water when travelling if you are unsure of the supply. Remember that ice cubes could also be contaminated
- Avoid swimming in water that may be contaminated

How is shigellosis treated?

Antibiotic treatment is available for shigellosis and must be prescribed by a physician. Treatment usually reduces the time that the bacteria are present in the intestinal tract to a few days.

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