

# SHIGELLOSIS

## What is shigellosis?

**Shigellosis (also known as dysentery) is an acute bacterial infectious disease caused by a group of bacteria called *Shigella*.**

Anyone can get shigellosis, but it occurs more often in following groups:

- Children and 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* is an extremely infectious bacteria, and it can take only a small dose of bacteria to cause illness.

## What are the symptoms of shigellosis?

Symptoms may range from mild to severe to no symptoms at all. *Shigella* causes diarrhea (that may contain mucus or blood), accompanied by fever, nausea, stomach cramps and frequent urge to pass stool.

## 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.

## How does shigellosis spread?

*Shigella* bacteria are found in the intestine of infected people and are passed in their feces (stool). Most people continue to pass *Shigella* while symptomatic but may continue to shed the bacteria even after their symptoms have stopped. In some cases, they can pass the bacteria for up to four weeks after the illness.

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

## How can shigellosis be prevented?

Thorough hand washing is the best way to prevent shigellosis. Wash hands carefully with soap and water before preparing or eating food, after changing diapers and after using the toilet.

Other preventative measures include:

- Infected workers, such as food handlers, health care workers and childcare providers should stay home and not prepare food for others until they are no longer shedding the bacteria
- 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?

A doctor may prescribe antibiotic treatment for shigellosis. Treatment usually reduces the time the bacteria are present in the intestinal tract to a few days.