



SHIGELLOSIS

(shih-GEHL-uh -sis)

What is shigellosis?

Shigella infection (shigellosis) is an infectious illness of the intestines. It is caused by a group of bacteria called *shigella* and affects people of all ages. In the United States, *Shigella* annually causes about 500,000 cases of diarrhea.

What are the symptoms?

Most common symptoms are fever, abdominal cramps and diarrhea (which may contain blood or mucous). Signs of infection often start 1-3 days, but may range from 12 hours – 4 days, after exposure to the germs. Although some people have no symptoms after they have been infected with *shigella*, they may still pass the bacteria to others. Some persons, especially young children and the elderly may need hospitalized due to severe diarrhea and dehydration.

How is shigella spread?

The *shigella* bacteria pass from one infected person to another. Most infections occur from direct contact (such as, hand to mouth transfer from the stool of an infected person) or indirect contact (such as, swallowing or ingesting bacteria in contaminated food sources or water). The amount of bacteria that may cause illness is extremely low, 10-100 organisms. *Shigella* can easily spread by persons who fail to thoroughly wash their hands or clean under their fingernails after use of the bathroom or after changing a diaper.

Young children, especially those not fully toilet-trained, are particularly likely to “share” the germ with others. Family members and playmates of these children are at high risk of becoming infected.

How is it treated?

Most people recover without antibiotic treatment in about 5 to 7 days. However, if untreated, the germ may continue to be present in the stool for up to four weeks. Also, it is not usual to take weeks or months before bowel habits return to normal. Over-the-counter anti-diarrheal medications should be used only with a physician’s recommendation.

Antibiotics are generally recommended for food handlers, healthcare workers and children (and workers) in daycare centers. Appropriate treatment kills the *Shigella* bacteria that is present in the patient’s stools, reduces the length of the illness, and shortens the shedding period of bacteria in the stool. Keep your doctor informed of diarrhea which does not resolve with prescribed treatment. Further testing may be required.

How can shigellosis be prevented?

Ohio Law requires that cases of shigella be reported to the local health department. Summit County Public Health staff are responsible for investigating the case to gather information about onset of symptoms, course of illness, treatment, possible source of exposure and infection.

If a child attends daycare or an adult is in a sensitive occupation (childcare worker, food handler or healthcare provider) he/she is excluded from daycare or employment until free of symptoms, negative testing results obtained **and** cleared by the health department.

TIPS FOR PREVENTION

- Frequent and thorough handwashing is important among all age groups! Special attention is needed after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and before eating or preparing food.
- Supervised hand washing of all children should be followed in day care centers and in homes with children who are not completely toilet-trained (including children in diapers). When possible, young children with a *Shigella* infection who are still in diapers should not be in contact with uninfected children.
- Proper disposal of diapers and other soiled material. A closed-lid trash container is advised.
- Adequate cleaning of diaper changing areas, toys, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, tables, and other surfaces with a diluted bleach solution (1/4 cup bleach to 1 gallon water) or appropriate commercial product.
- Persons with diarrhea should **never** handle or prepare food. A person with a known infection of *Shigella* should not prepare food or pour water until laboratory tests have confirmed that they are no longer shedding the bacteria in their stool.
- Cover or protect food from insects during outside picnic or event.
- Thoroughly rinse all vegetables and fruits with clean water. Produce can become contaminated if growing fields contain human sewage. Flies can breed in infected feces and then contaminate food when they land on it.
- Avoid swallowing water from swimming pools, lakes, or ponds.
- Infants and young children with diarrhea should not use swimming pools and should not attend childcare settings.
- Be a good teacher and role model to others!

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

SCPH Communicable Disease Unit: 330-375-2662

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov)

Mayo Clinic (www.mayoclinic.com)

Minnesota Department of Health (www.health.state.mn.us)