

SHIGELLOSIS (Bacillary dysentery)



What is shigellosis?

Shigellosis is an infectious disease caused by a group of bacteria called *Shigella*. Most cases of disease in the U.K. are due to infection with a type called *Shigella sonnei*.

What are the symptoms of Shigellosis

Most people who are infected with *Shigella* develop diarrhoea, fever, and stomach cramps starting 1 to 3 days after they are exposed to the bacterium. It usually resolves itself within 5 to 7 days although in some people, especially the young and the elderly, it may require hospital treatment. Some persons who are infected with *Shigella* don't have any symptoms at all, but may still pass the infection on.

How do you contract Shigellosis?

Most cases of shigellosis are due to person to person spread when the bacteria may be passed from one infected person to the next. *Shigella* are present in the stools of infected persons while they are sick and for a week or two after. The bacteria may be transferred underneath the fingernails if hand-washing is not thorough. Inanimate objects such as flush handles, taps, changing mats may also act as vectors of transmission if they are contaminated with even microscopic amounts of faeces. Contaminated

food and water are also capable of causing infection although in this country it only accounts for a minority of cases.

Due to the method of contracting infection toddlers who are not fully toilet trained are particularly prone to this illness. Adults who care for them and family members are also at high risk of infection.

What is the treatment for Shigellosis?

If you have any queries regarding your symptoms you should consult your G.P. In most cases the illness is usually self limiting. The symptoms typically last for 1 week, but it may be longer before bowel habits return to normal.

Some Tips for Preventing Shigellosis

- Frequent and careful handwashing with warm water and soap is the best method of preventing transmission of the bacterium. Young children must be supervised when handwashing.
- For children who are in nappies, it is important that the nappies are disposed of immediately and that the person who changes the child washes their hands carefully. The changing mat or area should be thoroughly cleaned with a solution such as Milton.
- If someone in the house has Shigellosis it is important to regularly clean the toilet seat, flush handles, wash hand basin, bathroom door handle etc, with a dilute bleach. Always follow the manufacturers instructions regarding dilution and keep the chemicals well out of the reach of children.
- An adult who has Shigellosis should refrain from preparing food for other household members, if possible, for a period of at least 48hrs after their symptoms have stopped. If this is not possible

extreme care must be taken with handwashing after using the toilet and before preparing food.

Am I at risk of passing the infection on?

If you work as a food handler, health care worker or have close contact with young children, you should stay off work and seek advice from your local environmental health department. You should also inform your employer.

If the infection is in a young child you must keep them away from playgroups or nursery and seek advice from your local environmental health department.

During the infectious period, you should be extra careful about personal hygiene and ensure you or your child wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the toilet and before handling food.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used as a substitute for consultation with your G.P.

For further information, contact:
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