

Shigellosis Fact Sheet

- 1. What is Shigellosis?** - Shigellosis is an infection caused by *Shigella* bacteria. Those who are infected generally develop diarrhea, fever and abdominal cramps. Most cases are seen in the summer and early fall and occur as single cases or outbreaks.
- 2. Who gets Shigellosis?** - Anyone can get Shigellosis, but it is recognized more often in young children. Those who may be at increased risk include children in child care centers, foreign travelers to certain countries, and people in nursing homes, hospitals, and other facilities. Animals are not infected with nor do they carry *Shigella* bacteria.
- 3. How are *Shigella* bacteria spread?** – Most *Shigella* infections are the direct result of the bacteria passing from stool or soiled hands of one person to the mouth of another. The bacteria may also be acquired from eating or drinking contaminated food or water. Because very small amounts of *Shigella* bacteria can cause illness, people can spread the bacteria if they do not thoroughly wash their hands after using the toilet or immediately before preparing or eating food, or if they don't carefully handle soiled items like diapers. Outbreaks have occasionally been associated with swimming in fresh water or improperly chlorinated pools contaminated by the bacteria.
- 4. What are the symptoms of Shigellosis?** - People may experience mild or severe diarrhea, often with fever, vomiting, abdominal pain, and traces of blood or mucous in the stool. Some infected people may not show any symptoms but can still spread the disease to other people.
- 5. How is Shigellosis diagnosed?** – It is diagnosed by collecting stool specimens in order to culture and identify the bacteria in a laboratory.
- 6. How soon do symptoms appear after exposure?** - The symptoms usually develop within one to three days after exposure, but can take as long as seven days to appear.
- 7. When and how long is a person able to spread Shigellosis?** - Shigellosis can be spread for as long as the bacteria can be found in a person's stool. Most people pass *Shigella* bacteria in their stool for one or two weeks, even after diarrhea stops. Young children, if untreated, can pass the bacteria for even longer. Suitable antibiotics may shorten the length of time the bacteria can be spread.
- 8. Should infected people be isolated or excluded from school or work?** - *Shigella* bacteria are passed in the stool of an infected person. People with diarrhea or who are unable to control their bowel habits should take steps to avoid spreading

the bacteria by thoroughly washing their hands with hot water and soap after using the toilet. Also, they should not prepare food for other people. Food handlers, child care and health care workers should be temporarily excluded from work. They must obtain two (2) negative stool samples and the approval of either the local or state health department before returning to their routine activities. Most other infected people may return to work or school when their diarrhea stops, provided that they thoroughly wash their hands after using the toilet.

9. What is the treatment for Shigellosis? - There is no vaccine to prevent Shigellosis. However, Shigellosis can usually be treated with antibiotics. Appropriate treatment kills the *Shigella* bacteria that might be present in the patient's stools, and shortens the illness. However, these bacteria are frequently resistant to antibiotics thus the choice of antibiotics should be based on laboratory results.

10. What can be done to prevent the spread of Shigellosis? - Because the bacteria are passed in the stool, the following preventative measures should be observed to prevent the spread of Shigellosis:

- a. Wash hands with soap or use an alcohol based hand sanitizer carefully and frequently, especially after going to the bathroom, after changing diapers, and before preparing foods or beverages;
- b. Dispose of soiled diapers properly;
- c. Disinfect diaper changing areas after using them;
- d. Keep children with diarrhea out of child care settings;
- e. Supervise hand washing of toddlers and small children after they use the toilet;
- f. Persons with diarrheal illness should not prepare food for others;
- g. If you are traveling to the developing world, "*Boil it, cook it, peel it, or forget it.*"

11. For more information about Shigellosis:

<http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/shigellosis/>

This fact sheet provides general information. Please contact your physician for specific clinical information.

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