



Shigella

Shigella is a bacterium that spreads very easily from person-to-person because it only takes a very small number of *shigella* bacteria to make a person sick. Characteristics of *shigella* illness (shigellosis) can include stomach pain and cramps, diarrhea with mucus and sometimes blood, and fever.

How is shigellosis spread?

Shigella bacteria are found in the feces of infected individuals and it is most commonly spread from person-to-person.

How sick does it make you?

Most people with shigellosis will get better on their own in 5-7 days. However, the illness can be more severe in children, the elderly and people with chronic conditions.

What are the symptoms?

If you have shigellosis you may experience mild or severe diarrhea (which can be watery, bloody or contain mucus), fever, nausea and stomach cramps. On average, the illness lasts seven days, but rarely can last for up to a month. Some people infected with *shigella* may have no or very mild symptoms but they can still pass the illness to others without knowing it. Therefore handwashing after using the washroom, even in those who are well, is very important. Handwashing is also especially important if you are ill yourself or have been in contact with a patient with shigellosis.

If I am sick, what should I do?

1. If you or your child have diarrhea, especially with fever, painful cramps, and mucus and blood, contact your doctor. They can arrange for assessment and treatment.
2. Stay home from work or school, and from visiting friends and relatives, preferably until at least 48 hours after your diarrhea has stopped.

This is especially important if you work in an occupation such as food service, childcare, eldercare or healthcare because you may infect those at high risk of severe illness.

3. Wash your hands properly and often. Handwashing with soap and running warm water, especially after using the toilet, is the single most important way to stop the spread of *shigella*.
4. If you are sick, do not prepare food for others.

What can a person do to prevent this illness?

The spread of *shigella* from an infected person to other persons can be stopped by frequent and careful handwashing with soap. Frequent and careful handwashing is important among all age groups. Handwashing among children should be frequent and supervised by an adult especially in daycare centers and homes with children who have not been fully toilet trained.

If a child in diapers has shigellosis, everyone who changes the child's diapers should be sure the diapers are disposed of properly in a closed-lid garbage can, and should wash his or her hands and the child's hands carefully with soap and warm water immediately after changing the diapers. After use, the diaper changing area should be wiped down with a disinfectant such as diluted household bleach, or bactericidal wipes. When possible, young children with a *shigella* infection who are still in diapers should not be in contact with uninfected children.

Basic food safety precautions and disinfection of drinking water prevents *shigella* contamination of food and water. However, people with shigellosis should not prepare food or drinks for others until they have been shown to no longer be carrying the *shigella* bacterium, or if they have had no diarrhea for at least 2 days.