

Shigella - Shigellosis

What is Shigellosis?

Shigella (shih-GEHL-uh) bacteria cause an infection called shigellosis. Shigella cause an estimated 450,000 infections in the United States each year.

How do Shigella bacteria spread?

Shigella spread easily; it takes just a small number of bacteria to make someone ill. People with a Shigella infection can spread the infection to others for several weeks after their diarrhea ends.

You can get infected by swallowing Shigella. Some ways Shigella can get into your mouth are:

- Getting Shigella on your hands and touching your mouth. Shigella can get on your hands by:
 - Touching surfaces, such as toys, bathroom fixtures, changing tables, and diaper pails contaminated with Shigella bacteria from someone with an infection.
 - Changing the diaper of a child with a Shigella infection.
 - Taking care of a person with an infection, including cleaning up after the person uses the toilet.
- Eating food prepared by someone with a Shigella infection.
- Swallowing recreational water, such as lake water or improperly treated swimming pool water.
- Swallowing contaminated drinking water, such as water from a well that's been contaminated with sewage or flood water.
- Exposure to stool (poop) during sexual contact with someone with a Shigella infection or who has recently recovered from a Shigella infection.

What are the symptoms of Shigella infection and how long do they last?

Most people with Shigella infection experience:

- Diarrhea that can be bloody
- Fever
- Stomach pain
- Feeling the need to pass stool (poop) even when the bowels are empty

Symptoms usually start 1–2 days after infection and last 7 days. In some cases, bowel habits (frequency and consistency of stool) do not return to normal for several months.

When to contact your doctor?

People with diarrhea should contact their doctor if they have any of these symptoms:

- Fever
- Bloody diarrhea
- Severe stomach cramping or tenderness
- Dehydration

People who are in poor health or whose immune systems are weakened from diseases (such as HIV) or medical treatments (such as chemotherapy for cancer) are more likely to get sick for a longer period of time. Contact your doctor if you are in one of these groups and have symptoms of Shigella infection (shigellosis).

How can Shigella infection be diagnosed?

Many kinds of germs can cause diarrhea. Knowing which germ is causing an illness is important to help guide appropriate treatment. Healthcare providers can order laboratory tests to identify Shigella germs in the stool of an infected person.

How can Shigella infection be treated?

People who have shigellosis usually get better without antibiotic treatment in 5 to 7 days. People with mild shigellosis may need only fluids and rest. Bismuth subsalicylate (for example, Pepto-Bismol) may be helpful but people sick with shigellosis should not use medications that cause the gut to slow down and interfere with the way the body digests food, such as loperamide (for example, Imodium) or diphenoxylate with atropine (for example, Lomotil). Healthcare providers may prescribe antibiotics for people with severe cases of shigellosis to help them get better faster. However, some antibiotics are not effective against certain types of Shigella. Healthcare providers can order laboratory tests to determine which antibiotics are likely to work. Tell your healthcare provider if you do not get better within a couple of days after starting antibiotics. They can do more tests to learn whether your type of Shigella bacteria can be treated effectively with the antibiotic you are taking. If not, your doctor may prescribe another type of antibiotic.

How can Shigellosis be prevented?

You can reduce your chance of getting sick from Shigella by taking these steps:

- Carefully washing your hands with soap and water during key times:
 - Before preparing food and eating.
 - After changing a diaper or helping to clean another person who has defecated (pooped).
- If you care for a child in diapers who has shigellosis, promptly throw away the soiled diapers in a covered, lined garbage can. Wash your hands and the child's hands carefully with soap and water right after changing the diapers. Clean up any leaks or spills of diaper contents immediately.
- Avoid swallowing water from ponds, lakes, or untreated swimming pools.
- When traveling internationally, stick to safe eating and drinking habits, and wash hands often with soap and water.
- Avoid having sex (vaginal, anal, and oral) for one week after your partner recovers from diarrhea. Because Shigella germs may be in stool for several weeks, follow safe sexual practices, or ideally avoid having sex, for several weeks after your partner has recovered.



For more information:

Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website at <https://www.cdc.gov/shigella/index.html> or contact the Huron County Public Health at (419) 668-1652 ext. 269.