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## Shigella Infection (Shigellosis) Frequently Asked Questions

### What is Shigella infection (Shigellosis)?

Shigella infection (Shigellosis) is a highly contagious diarrhea caused by Shigella bacteria.

### Who can get it?

Anyone can get Shigellosis. People who are at higher risk for getting Shigella infection include:

- People living in crowded conditions, especially if they have less access to washing facilities
- Men who have sex with men
- Young children in child care settings
- People traveling to the developing world

### What are the symptoms of Shigella infection?

The main symptom is diarrhea that is watery, bloody, or both. Fever, stomach aches, and nausea often occur. Vomiting is uncommon.

People usually become sick 12 to 96 hours after Shigella bacteria enter the body, and symptoms typically last 4 to 7 days. Shigellosis sometimes causes seizures, bloodstream infection, or arthritis. In some persons, especially young children, elderly, or immunocompromised persons, severe diarrhea can occur and cause dehydration which may require hospitalization.

### How is Shigella infection spread?

Shigella is very infectious and spreads easily. People with infection have Shigella bacteria in their feces (stool) while they are sick and for a week or more afterward. The infection spreads when stool from one person gets into the mouth of another person. The amount of infected feces needed to transmit disease is very small and may not be visible to the naked eye. Examples:

- Through unknown exposure to infected feces or objects that have infected feces on them
  - Using unclean utensils, cups, and other dishes
  - Sharing personal items with an infected person, such as cigarettes and pipes
- During sexual contact
  - Through mouth to anus contact (sometimes called rimming)
  - By getting feces onto your fingers and then touching your mouth
  - By putting contaminated objects like sex toys into your mouth
- From contaminated food or water
  - When sanitation and hygiene are poor
  - In developing countries without adequate drinking water treatment
  - In recreational settings such as lakes, pools, and water park play fountains

**How can Shigella infection be prevented?**

Wash hands frequently with soap and water, especially after using the bathroom and before eating, drinking, or smoking. If you do not have soap and water, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. To thoroughly clean your hands:

- **Wet** your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), turn off the tap, and apply soap.
- **Lather** your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Be sure to lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.
- **Scrub** your hands for 20 seconds (the time it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice)
- **Rinse** your hands well under clean, running water.
- **Dry** your hands using a clean towel or air dry them.

Be aware of the ways that tiny particles of feces can enter your mouth, such as biting your nails, or sharing cups, bottles, utensils, plates, or other household equipment.

During sexual contact, avoid direct contact between the mouth and the anus (rimming). Use a dam, plastic wrap, or a cut-open condom if you cannot avoid mouth to anus contact. Immediately after sex, thoroughly wash hands and other body parts or objects that may have touched feces.

**What are some other important steps to prevent Shigella infection?**

- Young children should be supervised when washing hands in day care centers and at home.
- Children with diarrhea must be kept out of day care until the infection has cleared.

Also, note that persons with Shigellosis who are involved in food handling, care of patients or the elderly are restricted from working in those roles by the California Code of Regulations (Title 17, Section 2502) until they have demonstrated to the Health Department that they have cleared the infection.

**When should I seek medical advice?**

Contact your health care provider if you experience any of the following: severe diarrhea or loose stools, abdominal pain/cramps, or a fever.

**What is the treatment for Shigella infection?**

Most Shigella infections get better after several days without any medical treatment. If you have diarrhea, drink lots of fluids to avoid dehydration.

If your doctor does a stool test and finds that you have Shigella, you will probably be treated with antibiotics to help you get better faster, and to make you less likely to spread the infection to other people.

**For more information about Shigella infection, contact:**

The San Francisco Department of Public Health's Communicable Disease Control Unit, [www.sfdcdp.org](http://www.sfdcdp.org) or call us at (415) 554-2830, Monday – Friday 8 am to 5pm, excluding holidays.