

SHIGELLA FACTSHEET

What is Shigella?

Shigella is a group of bacteria that causes an illness known as shigellosis.

Who can get shigellosis?

Anyone. However, travelers to developing countries, young children, people whose immune systems are weakened due to illness (such as HIV) or medical treatment (such as chemotherapy for cancer) and men who have sex with men are at the highest risk for infection.

What are the symptoms of shigellosis?

Symptoms of shigellosis can include diarrhea (may be bloody), abdominal pain, fever, and a painful sensation of needing to pass stools even when bowels are empty.

How soon do symptoms appear?

People with *Shigella* infection (shigellosis) usually start experiencing symptoms 1 to 2 days after contact with the germ.

How does shigellosis spread?

People can get *Shigella* infection by:

- **Getting *Shigella* germs on their hands** and then touching their food or mouth. This can happen after changing the diaper of a sick child or caring for a sick person and touching surfaces contaminated with germs from feces/ poop from a sick person. Surfaces include diaper pails, changing tables, bathroom fixtures, and toys.
- **Eating food** that was prepared by someone who has a *Shigella* infection (shigellosis). Foods that are consumed raw are more likely to be contaminated with *Shigella* germs. *Shigella* germs can also get on fruits and vegetables if the fields where they grow are contaminated with feces/ poop containing the germ.
- **Swallowing recreational water** (for example, lake or river water) while swimming or drinking water that is contaminated with feces/poop containing the germ.

- **Having contact with feces/poop during sexual contact** with someone who has or recently had diarrhea.

How is shigellosis treated?

People with *Shigella* infection should drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. People with bloody diarrhea should not use anti-diarrheal medicines, such as loperamide (Imodium) or diphenoxylate with atropine (Lomotil). These medicines may make symptoms worse. For severe cases, your health care provider may prescribe antibiotics to reduce the duration of symptoms.

How can a person protect themselves against shigellosis?

- **Carefully [wash your hands](#) with soap and water** during key times: Before any sexual activity, before preparing food or eating, after going to the bathroom, changing a diaper, or cleaning up after someone who went to the bathroom.
- **Take care when changing diapers.**
- **Avoid swallowing water** from ponds, lakes, or swimming pools.
- **When traveling internationally**, follow [safe food and water habits](#) and wash hands often with soap and water.
- **If you or your partner has been diagnosed with shigellosis, do not have sex.** To reduce the chance of *Shigella* spreading, wait at least two weeks after diarrhea ends to have sex.

Should a person with shigellosis stay home from work or school/day care?

Children should be kept home while they have diarrhea. People who work in healthcare, food service, or child care facilities should not prepare or handle food for others while ill.

Where can I get more information?

Information about shigellosis and other related health topics can be found at www.cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please visit <https://dchealth.dc.gov> or call (202) 442-9021.