

What Is Shigellosis?

Shigellosis (also known as dysentery) is an infection caused by a group of bacteria called *Shigella*.

What are the symptoms?

Most people have diarrhea, fever and stomach cramps starting 12-96 hours after they are exposed. The diarrhea is often bloody. Illness usually lasts 5 to 7 days and resolves on its own. Some people may have mild infection with no symptoms at all. In some cases the symptoms can be severe and last for several days or weeks.

Kidney failure in both young children and the elderly may occur. Symptoms include irritability, fatigue, paleness of the skin, puffiness around the eyes and ankles, and decreased urine production. The elderly, those who are malnourished, and young children are considered to be more susceptible.

How is it spread?

The bacteria live in the intestines of infected people and are passed from feces or soiled hands to the mouth of another person. Person-to-person spread between family members is common. You can also become sick from contaminated food or water. Food may become contaminated when infected food handlers do not wash their hands properly after using the bathroom. Water may become contaminated if sewage runs into it. Vegetables irrigated with contaminated water and shellfish from contaminated water may also spread these bacteria. Flies can spread disease by being in contact with infected feces and then landing on uncovered food.

How do you prevent Shigellosis infection?

- Hand washing is the best prevention. Make sure hands are washed after using the toilet and changing diapers, and before handling and eating food.
- Infected people should not work as food handlers or care providers until they have no symptoms for 48 hours.
- Drink water from a safe supply. When travelling use bottled water or boil the water for at least 1 minute if the water supply is unknown (boil for 3 minutes at a high altitude). Remember that ice cubes can also be contaminated.
- Avoid swimming in water that may be contaminated.
- Avoid eating raw shellfish harvested from unknown sources.
- Protect food against flies and cockroaches.
- Wash all fruits and vegetables before use.

Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 x349. Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | www.hpepublichealth.ca

Reference

1. Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors, Shigellosis.

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