

SHIGELLA

(Shigellosis, bacillary dysentery)

Your Questions Answered

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EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

What is Shigella?

Shigella are a group of bacteria that infect the gut causing diarrhoea. The only significant source is man. The most common type in the UK is *Shigella sonnei*. This infection is also known as dysentery. It is common amongst young children and after people have travelled abroad in areas where hygiene is poor.

How do I know if I have a Shigella infection?

Diagnosis can only be confirmed by testing a sample of your faeces (stools). This is usually at the request of your doctor.

How is it spread?

Shigella is present in the gut of infected people who will pass the bacteria in their faeces. This can mean the infection is spread if hand washing after using the toilet is not carried out properly. Because Shigella is very infectious it can then easily pass from person to person. Consuming food, drink, or water that has been contaminated by an infected person can also cause the illness.

What are the symptoms

The usual symptoms are diarrhoea, fever and nausea. The diarrhoea typically contains blood and mucus but may instead be very watery.

Occasionally, patients suffer from vomiting, blood poisoning, straining and stomach cramps. Young children may sometimes get convulsions.

Infected people can show mild or no symptoms. The illness lasts on average for about 7 days. Infrequently, it may persist for several weeks.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Symptoms start between 1 and 7 days after exposure. The average is 2 to 3 days.

How long is a person able to spread the infection?

An infected person can pass Shigella in their faeces up to 3 weeks after the illness. Most people recover on their own. Drinking plenty of fluids is important to prevent dehydration. If symptoms persist or you continue to feel unwell you should contact your doctor

Do infected people need to stay away from work or school?

All cases of gastroenteritis are regarded as potentially infectious. All infected people should stay away from work or school until free from diarrhoea and vomiting (without medication) for at least 48 hours. Inform your employer, child carer or school as soon as possible to help them identify if they may have an outbreak.

If you belong to one of the following 'high risk' groups, additional precautions are needed & you have a duty to report your illness to your employer, child carer or school.

- food handlers involved with unwrapped or ready to eat food,
- staff of health care facilities in contact with food or patients,
- children aged below 5 years attending nurseries, playgroups, etc
- older children and adults who may find it difficult to carry out good personal hygiene

Infected people in these groups must not return to work, school, nursery, etc until 2 faecal samples taken at least 48 hours apart have been found clear of the Shigella bacteria. This testing also applies to people in these groups who have been in contact with an infected person (such as within a household) but have not yet shown any symptoms themselves.

It is very important to get in touch with us if you, or anyone else in your household, are in one of these 'high risk' groups. This is to enable us to give any necessary advice to halt the potential spread of the illness.

Visitors

It is strongly recommended you do not have any visitors (this includes friends, family and your children's friends) into your home until everyone within your home has fully recovered and the appropriate testing has confirmed the infection has totally cleared. This is particularly important for children under the age of 5 or older children/adults who are unable to carry out good personal hygiene.

How can I prevent it spreading?

Hand washing is the most important factor in preventing the spread of infection. Thoroughly wash your hands with soap under warm running water:

- AFTER using or cleaning the toilet
- AFTER touching anything contaminated by diarrhoea or vomiting
- AFTER attending to anybody who is unwell
- AFTER handling dirty laundry, clothing or bedding
- AFTER handling used nappies
- BEFORE handling, preparing, serving, or consuming food or drink
- AFTER touching animals during visits at farms, wildlife parks, zoos, pet corners, etc

People who are ill should ideally use anti-bacterial liquid soap and separate towels or disposable paper tissues. A nailbrush can assist you to clean under your fingernails. Always dry your hands properly as this helps to remove bacteria. Young children should be assisted to ensure they wash their hands properly.

Cleaning the toilet

For as long as people are unwell:

- Disinfect the toilet seat after each use, using a separate cloth
- Wash and disinfect other items like bedpans or potties after each use
- Disinfect the door handle, wash hand basin taps and flush handle after use
- Clean the toilet bowl using a (toilet) brush and disinfectant. Rinse the brush by flushing the toilet, and replace in its holder
- Keep any rubber gloves used for cleaning the toilet for this use only
- Flush the toilet with the seat and lid down

Laundry

- Dirty laundry from persons with food poisoning should be kept separate from other laundry
- If possible remove any heavy soiling into the toilet before washing
- Wash soiled clothing and bedding separately on as hot a washing programme as possible without exceeding fabric care instructions

Food Safety Points to remember

- ALWAYS keep raw meat separate from other foods
- ALWAYS cook meat thoroughly, including at barbecues. This is normally until the juices run clear
- AVOID eating or drinking untreated milk or dairy products, or drinking untreated water

**REMEMBER TO WASH YOUR HANDS FREQUENTLY
ASSIST YOUNG CHILDREN TO WASH THEIR HANDS PROPERLY
MAKE SURE EVERYBODY FOLLOWS THESE PRECAUTIONS**

Further advice is available by contacting your Doctor or from:

East Cambridgeshire District Council
Environmental Services
The Grange
Nutholt Lane
Ely, Cambs CB7 4EE
Tel: 01353 665555
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