

Fact sheet

Shigellosis

What is shigellosis?

Shigellosis is a diarrheal infection caused by the bacteria called *Shigella*. Shigellosis is very contagious; just a small amount of germs can make someone sick.

How is shigellosis spread?

You can get shigellosis when you swallow something that has come into contact with the stool of someone else who is sick with shigellosis. You can get sick when you:

- Get *Shigella* germs on your hands and then touch your food or your mouth. You can get *Shigella* germs on your hands after you:
 - touch surfaces contaminated with germs from stool from a sick person, such as toys, bathroom fixtures, changing tables or diaper pails
 - change the diaper of a sick child or care for a sick person
- eat food that was prepared by someone who is sick with shigellosis
- swallow water when you swim or drink water that is contaminated with stool (poop) containing the germ
- are exposed to stool during sexual contact with someone who is sick or recently (several weeks) recovered from shigellosis

What are the signs and symptoms of shigellosis?

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

Some people with shigellosis will not have any symptoms. Symptoms usually last 5–7 days, but some people may experience symptoms anywhere from a few days to 4 or more weeks. In some cases, it may take several months before bowel habits are entirely normal.

How long after infection do symptoms appear?

People who are sick from *Shigella* infection usually start having symptoms 1–2 days after contact with the germ.

Who is most at risk?

- Young children; especially those in childcare settings and schools
- Travelers
- Men who have sex with men
- People who have weakened immune systems

What type of health problems are caused by shigellosis?

- A severe shigellosis illness may involve the infection spreading into the blood, which can be life-threatening.
- About 2% of people who are infected with the type of *Shigella* called *Shigella flexneri* will experience post-infectious

arthritis, which causes joint pain, eye irritation, and painful urination.

How is shigellosis diagnosed?

Healthcare providers can order laboratory tests to identify the type of *Shigella* germs in the stool (poop) of someone who is sick.

How is shigellosis treated?

Most people will recover from shigellosis without treatment in 5–7 days. Healthcare providers may prescribe antibiotics for some people who have severe cases of shigellosis. If your healthcare provider prescribes you an antibiotic, take it exactly as directed and make sure to finish all doses even if you start to feel better. However, some antibiotics are not effective against certain types of *Shigella* bacteria. Healthcare providers can order laboratory tests to determine which antibiotics are likely to work. People with shigellosis should not use antidiarrheal medication (for example, Imodium or Lomotil). These medications may make symptoms worse.

How can shigellosis be prevented?

- Wash your hands, especially after you go to the bathroom, before you eat or prepare food, and after you change diapers.
- Avoid swallowing water from ponds, lakes, or untreated swimming pools.
- When you travel internationally, stick to safe eating and drinking habits, and wash your hands often with soap and water. For more information, see

[Travelers' Health - Food and Water Safety.](#)

- Avoid having sex (vaginal, anal, and oral) for 2 weeks after your partner recovers from diarrhea.

If you have diarrhea, follow these steps:

- **Wash** your hands often. See above.
- **Wait** to have sex until your diarrhea is completely gone—at least 2 weeks after diarrhea stops. Use barriers (like condoms or dental dams) during sex.
- **Do not** prepare food for others while you are sick.
- **Avoid** swimming until you have fully recovered.
- **Do not** share food with anyone if you or your family members are ill.
- **Stay home** from childcare and school while sick or until your health department or healthcare provider says it's safe to return.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal healthcare provider
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [Utah Department of Health and Human Services](#)

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