

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?

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

- Getting *Shigella* germs on their hands and then touching food or mouth. You can get *Shigella* germs on your hands after:
 - Touching surfaces contaminated with germs from stool from a sick person, such as toys, bathroom fixtures, changing tables or diaper pails,
 - Changing the diaper of a sick child or caring for a sick person,
- Eating food that was prepared by someone who is sick with shigellosis,
- Swallowing recreational water (for example, lake or river water) while swimming or drinking water that is contaminated with stool (poop) containing the germ,
- Having exposure 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 to 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 experiencing symptoms 1 to 2 days after contact with the germ.

Who is most at risk?

- Young children; especially those in childcare settings and schools
- Travelers
- Gay or bisexual men who have sex with men
- People with 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 pains, 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 to 7 days. Healthcare providers may prescribe antibiotics for some people who have *severe* cases of shigellosis. 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 anti-diarrheal medication, (for example, Imodium or Lomotil). These medications may make symptoms worse.

How can shigellosis be prevented?

- Wash your hands, especially after going to the bathroom, before eating or preparing food, and after changing diapers.

- Avoid swallowing water from ponds, lakes, or untreated swimming pools.
- When traveling internationally, stick to safe eating and drinking habits, and wash hands often with soap and water. For more information, [see Travelers' Health - Food and Water Safety](#).
- Avoid having sex (vaginal, anal, and oral) for one week 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 one week 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 & Prevention](#)
- [Utah Department of Health](#)

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