

FACTSHEET 3 – Shigella

August 2016

What Is Shigella?

Infection with Shigella causes a disease called Shigellosis (also called Bacillary dysentery). It is caused by four species of bacteria: Shigella sonnei, Shigella boydii, Shigella dysenteriae and Shigella flexneri. It only causes disease in humans. The bacteria infect the gut, causing diarrhoea.

What Are The Symptoms?

People with Shigellosis usually have diarrhoea (often watery and sometimes bloody), which may be accompanied by fever, nausea and vomiting and abdominal cramps.

Shigella sonnei, which is commonly found in the UK, usually causes a relatively mild illness. Other Shigella species, which are usually found outside the UK can cause more serious illness.

How Do You Get Infected?

Infection is usually spread by consuming contaminated food or water. It can also be spread by person to person contact, especially between children, in households or in nurseries, crèches and schools. Symptoms usually start within two to four days.

Shigella can also be spread by intimate sexual contact.

How Can You Avoid Passing Shigella To Others?

You are infectious to other people while you are ill and have symptoms. Take the following steps to avoid passing the illness to others:

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after going to the toilet.
- Help young children to wash their hands properly.
- Do not prepare food for others until you have been symptom free for at least 48 hours.
- Wash all dirty clothes, bedding and towels on the hottest possible cycle of the washing machine.
- Clean toilet seats, toilet bowls, flush handles, taps and wash hand basins after use with detergent and hot water, followed by a household disinfectant.
- Avoid attending family and friends gatherings whilst you have symptoms.
- Avoid sexual contact until you have been symptom free for 48 hours.

As Shigella is easily transmitted to others, anyone with symptoms who has been in contact with Shigella is advised not to go to work, nursery or school if symptoms develop. You should stay at home until you have been free of symptoms for 48 hours before returning to your usual activities.

How Do You Treat Shigella?

Shigella sonnei usually clears up within four to seven days without needing treatment. It is important to drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration. You may need to take a course of antibiotics for the other types of Shigella infection depending on how severe the symptoms are. Your doctor will advise you about this.

Do You Need To Stay Off Work Or School?

If you have Shigella sonnei:

- While you are ill and have symptoms you are infectious.
- Children and adults should stay away from nursery, school or work for 48 hours after the symptoms have stopped.
- You should tell your employer you have had Shigella if you work with vulnerable groups such as the elderly, the young, those in poor health, or if you handle food.

If you have Shigella boydi/flexneri:

- You should not return to school/work for 48 hours after the symptoms have stopped.
- People who handle food at work, work in health care and young children, may have to stay off work/school/nursery for longer and provide stool samples to make sure it is safe for them to return.

If you have Shigella dysenteriae:

- Further advice regarding exclusion from work/school/nursery and follow up samples will be given by an Environmental Health Officer.