



Shigella Fact Sheet

What is *Shigella*?

Shigella is a group of bacteria that causes diarrheal illness. The most common species in the US is *Shigella sonnei*, but there are also other species such as *S. flexneri* and *S. dysenteriae*.

Who is at risk to get STEC infections?

Anyone can get infected with STEC. Young children and the elderly are more likely to suffer the serious complication of STEC infection called hemolytic-uremic syndrome, or HUS.

How is *Shigella* spread?

Shigella germs are shed in the poop of infected people when they have diarrhea, and for up to a week after the diarrhea goes away. These germs can be spread onto surfaces, foods, and into water (such as a lake while swimming) by someone not washing their hands after using the bathroom, or by direct contact with sewage. A new person can then ingest the bacteria and become sick. It only takes a few bacteria getting into a new person to make that person sick, meaning that *Shigella* is very contagious. *Shigella* can also be spread by exposure to feces through sexual contact.

What are the symptoms of *Shigella* infection?

Symptoms include diarrhea (sometimes bloody), fever, abdominal pain, and tenesmus. Symptoms usually last 5 to 7 days in healthy people. Once you have had *Shigella*, you are unlikely to get infected with the same type again for at least a few years. However, you can still get infected with other types of *Shigella*.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Usually, symptoms appear 1-2 days after the exposure to the bacteria.

How is this disease diagnosed?

Lab tests are done on stool specimens to identify *Shigella*

What is the treatment for *Shigella* infection?

Most people will get better on their own in 5 to 7 days. It's a good idea to drink lots of fluids and rest. A medicine like Pepto-Bismol may be helpful, but you should not take medicines that make the gut slow down like Imodium. If the infection is severe, antibiotics can help symptoms go away faster. A healthcare provider will need to do a test to figure out which antibiotics to use, because *Shigella* is often resistant to antibiotics.

What can be done to prevent the spread of this disease?

- WASH YOUR HANDS thoroughly after using the bathroom, changing diapers, or before preparing food. Wash your hands after contact with animals or their environments.
- Be very careful to wash your hands, the child's hands, and all surfaces after changing diapers of children.
- Avoid swallowing water when swimming or playing in lakes, streams, pools, and kiddie pools.
- Avoid sexual activity with those who have diarrhea or who recently recovered from diarrhea.
- People who work in food service, healthcare, or child care should stay home from work until they have no episodes of diarrhea for 24 hours, antibiotics have been taken for 48 hours, and two stool cultures collected at least 24 hours apart have both tested negative. This also applies to children in child care.