

Kent County Health Department

Shigellosis Fact Sheet



What is shigellosis?

Shigellosis is an illness caused by a bacterial germ that gets into the intestines.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms usually start one to two days after being infected. They include:

- stomach cramps
- fever
- diarrhea (many loose stools) that is often bloody
- constant pressure to have a bowel movement

How is shigellosis spread?

The *Shigella* germ is found in a person's stool (bowel movement). People spread it to others when they do not wash their hands after using the bathroom or changing the diaper of a child with this illness. People can spread shigellosis until the germ is no longer found in their stool, usually about four weeks after illness.

A person can also get shigellosis by eating contaminated food. Food can be contaminated when it is made by someone who is sick and didn't wash his hands after using the bathroom.

Vegetables can become contaminated if they are picked from a field with sewage in it. Water can be contaminated if sewage runs in it. A person who drinks or swims in that water could get sick.

Note: A person who has symptoms of diarrhea should not work as a food handler or take care of patients, children or senior citizens.

How is shigellosis diagnosed and treated?

The only way to find out if you have this germ is to see your doctor. You may be asked to bring with you a sample of your stool that will be checked for the *Shigella* germ. If you do have shigellosis, the doctor may ask other family members to be checked for the germ.

Shigellosis is treated with medication. Make sure you use all the medicine as prescribed. **Do not stop taking the medicine even if you feel better.** If you stop taking the medicine, you may not kill all the germs inside you. Your doctor may want to check another stool sample after you have finished the medicine to make sure that you are cured.

Is shigellosis a problem?

Shigellosis can lead to serious problems if not treated. In some cases, the diarrhea can lead to a loss of body fluids. Dehydration (loss of water) can be a problem, so it is important that people with shigellosis (especially babies and small children) continue drinking liquids like clear juices, broth, jell-o, or tea.

How can shigellosis be prevented?

If you get shigellosis, you have to be very careful not to spread it to other people.

- Wash your hands with soap and water after using the bathroom or changing diapers and before preparing food or drinks.
- Seal disposable diapers in a plastic

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bag. Put the bag in a tightly closed garbage can (this helps keep animals from scattering the soiled items and possibly spreading the germ to others).

- Wash soiled diapers (cloth), sheets or clothing in hot soapy water and dry in a hot dryer.
- Disinfect diaper changing areas after using them.
- Keep children with diarrhea out of child care settings.
- Supervise hand washing of small children after they use the bathroom.
- People with diarrhea should not prepare food or pour water for others until they have been shown not to have the germ.

How to wash your hands

1. Use warm water and liquid soap.
2. Lather all parts of the hands and rub briskly for 20 seconds. Be sure to include:
 - the backs of your hands
 - between your fingers
 - wrists
3. Use a brush or nail file to clean under your fingernails.
4. Rinse well under warm running water.
5. Dry hands with a paper towel or air dryer. Don't use a cloth towel.
6. Turn off the water using the paper towel

instead of your clean hands.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for talking with a health care provider. If you have any questions about shigellosis or think you may have it, call your health care provider.