

Shigella Infection

This is a bowel infection (gastroenteritis) caused by *Shigella* bacteria.

Symptoms may include:

- > diarrhoea (sometimes with blood or mucus)
- > fever
- > vomiting
- > stomach cramps.

Mild infections or infections without symptoms may occur. The most severe infections occur in the very young, the elderly and malnourished people.

The infection is diagnosed by growth of *Shigella* from a faecal specimen.

Spread takes place when hands, objects or food become contaminated with faeces of people who are infected and the bacteria are taken in by mouth. Small numbers of *Shigella* bacteria are sufficient to cause an infection, so stringent control measures are required.

The only significant source of infection is other people, as *Shigella* does not infect animals and does not survive very long outside of the human body. However, flies can carry the bacteria on their legs and contaminate uncovered food. Infections can occur when people ingest food or water freshly contaminated with faeces.

Incubation period

(time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)

1 – 7 days, usually 1 – 3 days.

Infectious period

(time during which an infected person can infect others)

While symptoms are present and until *Shigella* are no longer present in the faeces (usually within 4 weeks after illness). Rarely, people without symptoms can shed *Shigella* in their faeces for many months. After appropriate antibiotics, *Shigella* stop being shed in the faeces within a few days.

Treatment

Specific antibiotic therapy is available and will reduce the duration and severity of symptoms and the spread of infection. Gastroenteritis is a common illness which can be particularly serious in young children. There are several treatments which are useful for gastroenteritis of any cause. The following are general recommendations for the treatment of gastroenteritis.

Seek medical advice if any of the following symptoms occur:

Adults

- > signs of dehydration, such as thirst and decreased urination, lethargy, dry mouth, feeling faint on standing
- > fever
- > severe abdominal pain
- > bloody diarrhoea.

Children

- > signs of dehydration, such as thirst and decreased urination, lethargy, dry mouth, sunken eyes, feeling faint on standing
- > fever
- > abdominal pain
- > bloody diarrhoea
- > any symptoms in a child less than 12 months of age.

The following are general recommendations for the treatment of gastroenteritis:

- > Give plenty of fluids. Oral rehydration solution is highly recommended for children with mild to moderate dehydration. It is available at pharmacies and should be administered following the instructions on the packaging.
- > Mildly unwell children should be given their usual fluids more often. Carbonated (fizzy) drinks or undiluted juice should be avoided.
- > Medicines to prevent vomiting or diarrhoea should not be given (especially in children), except where specifically advised by a doctor.
- > Breastfed babies should continue to be breastfed throughout their illness.

Shigella Infection (cont.)

- > Children on formula or solid diets should restart their normal diet (including full strength lactose containing milk) following rehydration with oral rehydration solution.
- > Children who are hungry or ask for food should be given small portions of their usual foods, but avoid foods high in sugar or fat.

Control of spread

- > Exclude from child care, preschool, school and work until there has been no diarrhoea for 24 hours.
- > Infected people without symptoms who are involved in food preparation or in caring for patients in hospital, the elderly or children should take special care with hand washing. They may require proof that they are no longer infectious (by providing a faecal specimen) before returning to work.
- > Follow good hand washing and keeping areas clean procedures.
- > When several people in one group are ill with *Shigella*, the local health authority may review sanitary and hygienic aspects of the areas commonly used by affected people to reduce the chance of repeat infection.



Shigella infection is a notifiable disease

- > Hand Hygiene
- > Keeping Areas Clean
- > Preventing Food Poisoning at Home
- > Collecting a Faecal Sample