



Shigella Fact Sheet

What is Shigella?

Shigella is an infection of the gut caused by a bacterium called Shigella. It is a very common disease in Oklahoma. Most people become ill in the summer and early fall.

Who gets Shigella?

Anyone can get Shigella. Young children, especially those who are in day care centers, are infected more often. Travelers to developing countries and people with weakened immune systems also are more likely to get Shigella.

How is Shigella spread?

Shigella is found in the feces (stool) of an infected person and is very contagious. People can get Shigella when they put something in their mouths or swallow something that has come into contact with the stool of someone else who is sick with shigellosis. It can include eating contaminated food or drinking contaminated water.

What are the symptoms?

People infected with Shigella may have mild to severe diarrhea, fever, stomach pain, and painful bloody, mucous stools. Symptoms usually last 5 to 7 days, but some people may experience symptoms anywhere from a few days to 4 or more weeks. Some infected persons may not have any symptoms.

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How soon do symptoms appear?

People who are sick from Shigella infection usually start experiencing symptoms 1 to 2 days after contact with the germ.

How long is a person able to spread Shigella?

During your illness and until the bacteria is no longer in the feces (stool), may be as long as 4 weeks (if not treated with antibiotics). Appropriate antibiotic treatment usually reduces the time to a few days.

Should infected people be excluded from school or work?

Since Shigella is found in the feces (stool), people with diarrhea should not go to school or work. People who handle food, attend daycare centers, or are health care workers should be treated and have negative stool cultures before they return to work or the daycare center. The number of negative stool samples required depends on job duties. If several children in a daycare center have Shigella, and are being treated, they might be allowed to return to the daycare center earlier, if they can be separated from the well children.

What is the treatment for Shigella?

Most people will recover from Shigella without treatment in 5 to 7 days. Persons with severe diarrhea, especially small

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children and elderly people should see a doctor. People with Shigella should not use anti-diarrheal medication, since it could make symptoms worse. Bismuth subsalicylate (for example, Pepto-Bismol) can help to relieve symptoms. Healthcare providers may prescribe antibiotics for some people who have severe cases of shigellosis

What can be done to prevent the spread of Shigella?

Actions should be taken to prevent others from getting sick including:

- NOT swimming
- NOT preparing food for others
- Washing hands after using the toilet, after handling dirty diapers, and before eating or preparing food
- Staying home from school or from healthcare, food service, or childcare jobs while sick or until your health department says it's safe to return

*For further information, contact the
Oklahoma City-County Health
Department (405) 425-4437*

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