

What is shigellosis?

Shigellosis is a bacterial infection that affects the intestines. It is a fairly common disease.

Who gets shigellosis?

Anyone can get shigellosis but it is recognized more often in young children. Children in day care centers, travelers to certain foreign countries, institutionalized people, and active homosexuals are at greatest risk.

How is the shigella bacteria spread?

Shigella bacteria are found in the intestines and stool of infected people who, in turn, may contaminate food or water. The bacteria are spread by direct contact with an infected person, by eating or drinking contaminated food or water, or by contact with a contaminated object.

What are the symptoms?

People infected with the Shigella bacteria may have mild or severe diarrhea (often with traces of blood or mucous), abdominal cramping, nausea, and vomiting. Some infected people may not show any symptoms.

How soon do symptoms appear?

The symptoms usually appear one to three days after exposure, and usually last for four to seven days.

When and for how long is a person able to spread shigellosis?

People with shigellosis may be able to spread the disease even after they are well. Most people pass the shigella bacteria in their stool for one to two weeks. Sometimes people continue to pass the bacteria for as long as six weeks.

Should infected people be isolated or excluded from school or work?

Since the germ is passed in the stool of an infected person, people with active diarrhea or those who are unable to control their bowel habits should be isolated. Most infected people may return to work or school when their diarrhea stops if they carefully wash their hands after visits to the toilet. Foodhandlers, children and staff in day care settings, and health care workers must obtain the approval of the local or state health department before returning to their routine activities.

How is shigellosis treated?

Most people with shigellosis will recover on their own. Some may require fluids to prevent dehydration. Antibiotics are sometimes used to treat severe cases or to shorten the carrier phase, which may be important for foodhandlers, health care workers, children and staff in day care settings, and institutionalized individuals.

What can be done to prevent the spread of shigellosis?

Since the shigellosis bacteria are passed in the stool, the single most important way to prevent the disease is careful handwashing after using the toilet, after diapering children, and before preparing food. Please refrain from swimming pools until 2 weeks after symptoms end.

For additional information go to www.cdc.gov

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