

KNOWING THE FACTS:

Shigellosis is an infectious disease caused by bacteria that can live and grow in the digestive tract of humans. Shigella is a germ that is from a family of bacteria that can cause diarrhea in humans. They are microscopic living creatures that pass from person to person.

SYMPTOMS

What are the symptoms?

- Diarrhea, sometimes bloody; fever; nausea, sometimes vomiting; abdominal cramps, fever, headache, sometimes vomiting. Symptoms can last 12-96 hours (usually about 5-7 days) up to one week.

How soon do symptoms appear?

- Usually 1-2 days after a person is exposed to the bacteria.

TRANSMISSION

How is Shigella spread?

- Shigella leaves the body through the stool of an infected person and enters another person when contaminated hands, food, or objects are placed in the mouth, or by drinking feces-contaminated water. Very little of the organism is needed to become infected.
- Spread may also occur whether or not a person feels sick.
 - For Example, it is easy for diapered children to pass intestinal infections to others, but anyone who does not wash his or her hands after using the toilet or changing diapers can spread disease.

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

- As long as infectious germs are present in the stool, a person can be a possible source of disease spread. People can spread shigella to others for a week or 2 after symptoms stop so careful handwashing is important.

TREATMENT

How is Shigella treated?

- There is a lab test to check for shigella in the stool. In general your doctor may prescribe water and electrolyte replacement to prevent dehydration. Antibiotics are used as treatment but, unfortunately, some shigella have become antibiotic-resistant. Anti-diarrheal treatments are likely to make the illness worse and should be avoided. Contact your doctor about appropriate treatment if you think you may have symptoms of shigella.

PREVENTION

What can a person do to prevent this illness?

- Wash hands with soap carefully and frequently, especially after going to the bathroom, after changing diapers, and before preparing foods or beverages.
- Dispose of soiled diapers properly.
- Disinfect diaper changing areas after using them.
- Keep children with diarrhea out of child care settings.
- Supervise handwashing of toddlers and small children after they use the toilet.
- Do not prepare food for others while ill with diarrhea.
- Avoid swallowing water from ponds, lakes, or untreated pools.