

Shigella

Information Sheet

What is Shigella?

Shigella is a germ that causes a disease called shigellosis. People of all ages can get shigellosis. Most will get better without medical treatment. However, infants, elderly people and those with weakened immune systems can get very sick.

What are the symptoms of Shigella infection?

People usually get sick with Shigella 1 to 3 days after putting something into their mouth or swallowing something that has come into contact with the bacteria. Symptoms of shigellosis may include:

- Diarrhoea (sometimes bloody)
- Stomach pain
- Fever
- Vomiting

How do people get sick from Shigella bacteria?

People usually get sick from Shigella bacteria after putting something into their mouth or swallowing something that has come into contact with the faeces (poo, tūtae) of someone else who is sick with shigellosis. Just a small amount of Shigella germs can make someone sick.

People can get sick by:

- Getting Shigella germs on their hands, which may happen by
 - Changing nappies of children infected with Shigella
 - Helping someone who is sick with shigellosis
 - Travelling overseas in countries with poor sewage and drinking water systems
 - Eating food prepared by someone who was sick with shigellosis
 - Swallowing water that contained germs from faeces (poo, tūtae)
 - Having sex with someone who has Shigella bacteria in their poo
- Flies and cockroaches can also spread the germs from toilets to food

Some people get infected with Shigella germs without being sick. These people can spread the germs from their poo, for instance by getting the germs on their hands and then preparing food.

How bad is it?

Shigellosis is very unpleasant but does not last long. The worst symptoms are usually over in 5 to 7 days. It may take 4 weeks before fully back to normal. Very young children and elderly people may lose too much fluid when sick and may need to go to hospital.

A small number of people may get worse illness. Some have a reaction that causes joint pain, eye pain, and pain passing urine (peeing). Others can get kidney problems. This is very uncommon, but can occur in infants or in the elderly. People with Shigella infection should be taken to a doctor urgently if bruising or red spots on the skin occur, or if very drowsy and difficult to wake up.

How do you stop its spread?

- **Always wash and dry your hands thoroughly** after going to the toilet, changing nappies, before and after preparing food, and after caring for a person with diarrhoea
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect the toilet after use by someone with diarrhoea, using bleach.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces that have got faeces (poo, tūtae) on them, using a bleach-based household cleaner. Wear gloves when cleaning.
- People with Shigella **should not prepare food for others** until symptoms have gone and for 2 days afterward
- Clean any dirty clothing or linen from the sick person using detergent and a hot wash
- For advice on avoiding infection during travel: <https://www.safetravel.govt.nz/health-and-travel>

What about work, school or early childhood centres?

People with diarrhoea or vomiting should stay away from work, school or early childhood centres **until free of symptoms for 2 days**. Early childhood centres includes kindergartens, play centres, kohanga reo or Pacific Island language nests.

People with some kinds of Shigella infection may need to stay away until they had clearance tests to show their faeces (poo, tūtae) do not have Shigella anymore. The Health Protection Officer from the Public Health Service will advise on this. If antibiotics have been given, the first test should be taken at least 48 hours after the last dose of treatment. This will be arranged by your Doctor with your local Public Health Unit.

These clearance tests may be required for people who are:

- People in the food industry and who handle unwrapped food or raw foods not further heated
- Some early childhood workers
- healthcare, residential care and social care staff
- children attending early childhood centres (Kindergartens, childcare centres, play centres, Kohanga reo)
- other adults or children due to disability or another illness who could spread the infection

The Health Protection Officer will advise if you are in one of the above groups requiring clearance specimens. People with shigellosis can remain infectious for several days and up to 4 weeks after the diarrhoea has stopped so it is important that you wash and dry your hands properly after toileting during this time.

For further information please contact:



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