

Shigellosis (Shigella) Information Sheet

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What is it?

Shigellosis, pronounced "shig-a-low-sis" is an infection of the bowel caused by the bacteria *Shigella*. When a person is infected the *Shigella* bacteria is in their poo and can easily infect others.

Shigellosis is not common in New Zealand and most people who get it have recently travelled to less developed countries or have had contact with someone who has.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Symptoms usually start 1 to 3 days (sometimes up to 7 days) after contact with *Shigella* bacteria and last up to two weeks.

Symptoms include:

- stomach pain
- watery diarrhoea, pronounced dy-a-rea (runny poo)
- often there is blood or mucous in the diarrhoea
- fever
- vomiting (sometimes)
- nausea (sickness in the stomach and urge to vomit)

Some people who are infected do not have symptoms.

If you have these symptoms or think you might have Shigellosis you need to see a doctor. You will need to give the doctor a poo sample for testing.

How serious is it?

People usually make a complete recovery and have no severe or long lasting illness.

Young children and elderly people can become very sick if they get dehydrated. It is important to drink lots of water if you have shigellosis.

Shigellosis is a notifiable disease under the Health Act. This means your doctor must tell the District Health Board (DHB) if you have it. People with shigellosis who work in jobs where it could be easily spread, such as working with food, or in childcare or healthcare, will be contacted by a Health Protection Officer to work out how they got it (and prevent other people getting sick the same way).

Who is most at risk?

Shigellosis can affect anyone. Children, the elderly and people with weak immune systems are at greatest risk of having severe symptoms.

How could I get infected?

You get infected when you swallow the *Shigella* bacteria. This can happen when you:

- eat food that has been contaminated or poorly handled. Flies and other insects like cockroaches can transfer the bacteria to food
- contact with poo from a person that has shigellosis. This can happen if hands are not washed properly after going to the toilet or changing nappies
- drink untreated water. Animals can contaminate water collected from roofs, bores, creeks, lakes and streams
- swimming in contaminated waterways
- some types of sexual activity (oral-anal sex).

You can infect other people while the *Shigella* bacteria is in your body and poo. This is usually for a month from when your diarrhoea started.

How do I protect myself and others?

There is no vaccine to prevent shigellosis.

To avoid getting shigellosis:

- regularly wash your hands with soap and dry them thoroughly, especially after contact with animals, going to the toilet, changing a nappy, caring for a sick person and before preparing or eating food
- keep food covered
- cook food well – this will kill the bacteria
- wash raw fruit and vegetables before eating
- only drink water that is treated and known to be safe. If you are not sure if the water is safe boil it first. If you have your own water supply, protect it from animal and bird poo and treat the water.

If traveling overseas (especially to less developed countries):

- be careful around the food and water you consume.
- avoid uncooked foods
- avoid fruit and vegetables unless you are able to peel them yourself and then wash your hands
- drink bottled or boiled water

To avoid spreading shigellosis:

- regularly wash and dry your hands thoroughly
- do not go swimming in pools until you have had no symptoms for 2 weeks
- do not prepare food for others until you have had no symptoms for 48 hours (2 days)
- use household chlorine bleach mixed with water to disinfect areas where vomit and poo have spilled and clean surfaces and items you use often

Will I need to take time off work, school or preschool?

Anyone with diarrhoea or vomiting should not go to work, school, or daycare until they have had no symptoms for 2 days.

Food handlers, health care workers, childcare workers and children in childcare will need clearance from a doctor or nurse before they are allowed to return. Clearance usually involves providing a poo sample to check for *Shigella* bacteria.

People who have had close contact with a person with shigellosis may also need clearance before they go to work or childcare too depending on their risk factors (such as their job and exposure to the *Shigella* bacteria). For further advice about who needs clearance, please contact Hawke's Bay District Health Board Population Health on (06) 834 1815.

How is it treated?

Your doctor may prescribe antibiotics.

It is important to rest and drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration. This is especially important for children who are more likely to get dehydrated.

Where can I get further information?

For further information on shigellosis please contact your doctor or Hawke's Bay District Health Board Population Health on (06) 834 1815. You can also phone Healthline on 0800 611 116 at any time of the day or night to speak to a registered nurse.