

FACT SHEET

Shigella

Shigella is a highly contagious bacterium which infects the intestinal tract.

Symptoms: Symptoms include diarrhea which may be mild or severe, along with fever and nausea. The diarrhea may be watery or bloody. Vomiting and abdominal cramping may also occur. Some infected people may not show any symptoms.

Spread: *Shigella* is spread by direct or indirect contact with infected individuals. Food or water may be contaminated by direct or indirect contact with fecal material from infected people. *Shigella* often causes outbreaks in daycare centers. Parents often acquire the illness from their children.

Incubation: Symptoms appear within 12 to 96 hours (usually 1-3 days) after exposure to *Shigella*, or within one week for *S. dysenteriae*.

Contagious Period:

An infected person is contagious until the organism is not present in his/her stool. For most people this will be for one to two weeks, rarely does it exceed four weeks. Certain antibiotics may shorten this period.

Precautions: For diapered or incontinent use Contact Precautions for the duration of the illness.

Reportable: Within seven days by the Provider or Laboratory to the state or local health department.

Diagnosis and Treatment:

The physician will order a laboratory stool culture to provide the bacteriological diagnosis. Most people will recover on their own, usually within 4-7 days. Fluid and electrolyte replacement may be necessary if the diarrhea is watery and signs of dehydration are present. Antibiotics are occasionally used to treat severe infections or to shorten the carrier state, which may be important for food handlers, those who attend or work in child care, or institutionalized individuals.

Prevention: The best way to prevent the spread *Shigella* is careful hand washing using warm-running, soapy water:

- after using the toilet,
- before and after preparing food
- before and after changing diapers.

Since the bacteria are passed in the stools of infected people, those with active diarrhea or those who are unable to control their bowel habits should be isolated. In general, once diarrhea has ceased, people can return to work or school. Food handlers, children or staff in daycare, or health care workers must have two negative stool cultures collected 24 hours apart. If they were on antibiotics for their illness, the first specimen needs to be collected 24 hours after completion of antibiotic therapy.