Shigella

Patient information leaflet

For further information please log onto our website:

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What is Shigella?

Shigella is a bacterium that causes a very infectious illness called dysentery or shigellosis. The four species of bacteria causing shigellosis are:

- **Shigella sonnei** (this is the most common cause of dysentery in the UK),
- **Shigella flexneri**,
- **Shigella dysenteriae** and
- **Shigella boydii**.

How do you catch it?

Shigella is found in the gastrointestinal tract (bowel) and faeces (poo) of infected people and is easily spread from person to person (especially young children) by poor hygiene. Only a tiny amount needs to get into your mouth to get infected (e.g. via your fingers).

Occasionally it is spread by food and water that has been contaminated by people carrying the disease. It can also occur through sexual contact with a person who has the infection.

What are the symptoms of shigella?

Symptoms usually begin within 1-3 days of becoming infected, can last from 3-7 days and can include:

- Diarrhoea, sometimes bloody
- Fever
- Abdominal pain
- Nausea and vomiting
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Muscle aches

When can I return to work?

To reduce the risk of spreading infection, you should not return to work until the diarrhoea has stopped for 72 hours. Depending on the particular type of shigella you have and your occupation, you may need to provide 2 negative faecal (poo) samples. Your employer, school or college will provide more details.

How can I prevent the spread of infection?

- Wash your hands after using the toilet and regularly throughout the day and:  
  - Feeding young children or the elderly
  - Eating
  - Food handling and cooking
  - Before and after handling pets
  - Changing nappies
  - Airing infected area
  - Coming into contact with a person with shigellosis

Wash your hands after bearing the toilet and:

- Avoid sharing towels and facecloths with someone who has the symptoms of shigellosis.

When will I need treatment?

- Fever
- Abdominal pain
- Nausea and vomiting
- Headache
- Fatigue

What is the treatment for shigellosis?

- Antibiotics
- Fluid replacement
- Symptomatic relief

Will I need treatment?

If you have diarrhoea and vomiting, it is very important to drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration. Take oral rehydration therapy (ORT) salts if available. Food and water that is contaminated by people carrying the disease can also cause shigellosis.

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  - Eating
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