

## Wellness Articles

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## Preventing foodborne illness

Shigellosis is a type of foodborne illness caused by infection with the *Shigella* bacterium. It is more common in summer than winter. Children ages two to four are most likely to get the condition.

### What causes it?

Shigellosis is spread when the bacteria in feces (stool) or on soiled fingers are eaten. Poor handwashing habits and eating contaminated food may cause the condition. Shigellosis is often found in places where conditions are crowded and sanitation is poor.

- Shigellosis is likely to occur among toddlers who are not fully toilet trained. Family members and playmates of infected children are also at high risk of becoming infected.
- Food may become contaminated by infected food handlers who do not wash their hands with soap after using the toilet.
- Vegetables can be contaminated if they are harvested from a field that has sewage in it. Also, flies can breed in infected feces and then contaminate food.
- Shigellosis can result from drinking or swimming in contaminated water. Water may become contaminated if sewage runs into it or if someone with shigellosis swims in it.
- Shigellosis also can be spread through sex, especially through anal and oral sex.

### What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of shigellosis include diarrhea (often bloody), fever, and stomach cramps starting one or two days after you are exposed to the bacteria. Shigellosis usually lasts five to seven days. In some people, especially young children and older adults, the diarrhea can be so severe that a hospital stay is needed. Some people who are infected may have no symptoms at all but may still spread shigellosis to others.

### How is it diagnosed?

Because many different diseases can cause a fever and bloody diarrhea, lab tests are the best way to diagnose shigellosis. Your doctor will most likely still do a physical examination and ask you questions about your symptoms, foods you have recently eaten, and your work and home environments. A stool culture confirms the diagnosis. Blood tests may be done if your symptoms are severe or to rule out other causes.

### How is shigellosis treated?

Shigellosis is usually treated with antibiotics. But some types of *Shigella* bacteria are not killed by antibiotics. This is called resistance. Because using antibiotics can make these bacteria even more resistant, mild cases of shigellosis are often not treated with antibiotics. In this case, shigellosis is treated by managing complications until it passes. Dehydration caused by diarrhea is the most common complication. Do not use medicines to prevent diarrhea.

To prevent dehydration, take frequent sips of a rehydration drink (such as Pedialyte). Soda and fruit juices have too much sugar and not enough of the important [electrolytes](#) that are lost during diarrhea. These kinds of drinks should not be used to rehydrate.

When you feel like eating, start with small amounts of food. This will help you get enough nutrition.

### How can you prevent it?

You can help prevent the spread of shigellosis by washing your hands frequently and carefully with soap, especially if you work or spend time in daycare centres or with children who are not completely toilet trained. When possible, keep young children with shigellosis who are still in diapers away from uninfected children.

If your child is in diapers and has shigellosis, after diaper changing, wipe the changing area with a disinfectant such as diluted household bleach and put the diapers in a closed-lid garbage can. Then wash your hands with soap and warm water. To dilute household bleach, follow the directions on the label.

People who have shigellosis should not prepare food or pour water for others. *Shigella* are present in the diarrhea of people with shigellosis and for one to two weeks after symptoms have stopped.