

Shigellosis General Information

What is shigellosis?

Shigellosis is a disease caused by a group of bacteria called *Shigella*. The bacteria are found in the stools of infected people. Most infections are the result of the bacteria passing from the stools or unwashed hands of an infected person to the mouth of another person. This happens when good hygiene and proper hand washing techniques are not followed.

Shigella can also be passed in contaminated food. The food becomes contaminated when infected food handlers do not wash their hands after using the toilet. Also, flies can breed in infected stool and then land on and contaminate food. Contaminated food may look or smell fine. Water can also be contaminated if sewage runs into it or someone with shigellosis swims in it.

Who can get shigellosis?

Anyone can get shigellosis, but people at increased risk include:

- people who travel to certain foreign countries
- people who take part in activities where they could come in contact with feces, including changing diapers; and during sexual contact, especially anal sex.
- people who live in institutions

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of shigellosis include:

- diarrhea
- stomach cramps
- fever
- vomiting or upset stomach

What is the treatment?

People with mild cases often recover on their own. For more serious cases, a primary care provider can prescribe antibiotics to treat shigellosis.

How can you prevent shigellosis?

- *Shigella* bacteria can be killed by adequate cooking. Use a thermometer to ensure all foods have reached the [***required internal cooking temperature***](#) and reheat all food to an internal temperature of 74°C [165°F].
- Adequately wash hands before preparing food and after handling raw meat and shellfish, using the bathroom, changing diapers and handling garbage.
- Thoroughly clean work surfaces and utensils used to prepare raw meat, raw shellfish and other foods.

- Buy shellfish from reputable suppliers and thoroughly cook before eating, especially oysters.
- Drink water from a safe water supply.
- Avoid swallowing water if you are swimming or bathing in untreated water (natural swimming areas) and do not swim in pools or natural swimming areas if you have diarrhea.
- Eat and drink only pasteurized juice, cider, milk and milk products.
- Wash raw fruits and vegetables thoroughly with clean, safe running water before you prepare and eat them.
- Persons diagnosed with shigellosis or any other gastrointestinal illness should not prepare or serve food to other people or provide personal care for other people.
- When travelling, in particular in developing countries, drink water (including ice) from a safe source. Eat only cooked hot food. Eat only fruit that can be peeled.

For further education please refer to Health Canada's Healthy Canadians [Shigella](#) website and the Public Health Agency of Canada's [Shigella Fact Sheet](#).