



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

Oahu 586-4586, Maui 984-8213, Hilo 933-0912,

Kona 322-4877, Kauai 241-3563

Shigellosis

(includes Dysentery)

What is shigellosis?

Shigellosis is an infection of the gut caused by a group of bacteria called *Shigella*. It causes diarrhea which may be bloody, and can cause severe dehydration, particularly among very young children or elderly persons. *Shigella* is very easily spread by exposure to only a few organisms. Dysentery is caused by infection with one particular *Shigella* species (*Shigella dysenteriae*).

How do you get it?

Shigella is found in the stool (feces) of infected people, in food or water contaminated by an infected person, and on surfaces that have been touched by infected people. Shigellosis is highly contagious as exposure to just a few organisms can make you sick. It often occurs in toddlers who are not fully toilet-trained. Family members and playmates of children infected with *Shigella* are at high risk of becoming infected. *Shigella* can spread easily in environments such as day care facilities.

People become infected with *Shigella* by:

- Eating food or drinking liquids contaminated by an infected person;
- Touching contaminated surfaces or objects and then touching their mouth or putting a contaminated object into their mouth;
- Swallowing recreational water contaminated with *Shigella* (recreational water includes streams, rivers, springs, ponds, swimming pools, hot tubs, Jacuzzis, and water park fountains);
- Not washing hands after using the bathroom or changing diapers and then eating foods.

Shigellosis is not transmitted by coughing or sneezing.

What are the symptoms of shigellosis?

The symptoms include diarrhea (often bloody), abdominal pain, stomach cramps, and fever. Sometimes people infected with *Shigella* have no symptoms at all, but can still pass the bacteria to others. The illness usually lasts on average 4-7 days.

When do symptoms start?

The symptoms usually begin 1 to 3 days following infection with the bacteria, but the onset may occur in as few as 12 hours to 96 hours.

What is the treatment for shigellosis?

Fluid and electrolyte replacement is most important. Most persons with shigellosis will recover without treatment. However, a doctor can prescribe medicine to treat severe cases of the disease. In general, antidiarrheal medications are not recommended because they may prolong the illness.

Should a person with shigellosis stay home from school or work?

Students with diarrhea should stay home from school until the diarrhea stops. Food handlers, day care workers, and health care workers should not return to work until they prove they are no longer infectious, usually after two lab tests showing they are no longer infected.

How can you keep from getting it?

Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the toilet or changing diapers. After changing diapers, wash the child's hands as well as your own.

Wash your hands thoroughly before preparing or serving food and before eating or feeding children.

Avoid sexual practice that may permit fecal-oral transmission.

Keep flies from contaminating food.

For more information, see the CDC's website at <https://www.cdc.gov/shigella/>