

Shigellosis Food Poisoning

What is shigellosis?

Shigellosis is an infection caused by bacteria called Shigella. Because the bacteria usually enter the body through food, it is also called food poisoning.

The illness can be severe for children and older adults. It can cause dehydration (loss of too much fluid from the body), imbalance of chemicals in the body, and shock.

What is the cause?

The bacteria can live in the intestines of humans and primates, including monkeys and chimpanzees. People can carry the bacteria without looking or acting sick. Bowel movements can spread the bacteria to soil or water. Vegetables can be contaminated by contact with this soil or water. Contaminated food usually looks and smells normal.

You may get infected if:

- You eat contaminated food.
- You eat food that has been handled by someone who is infected.
- You eat or drink dairy products that have not been pasteurized (heated to kill certain bacteria)
- You swallow water from a well, lake, stream, or city water that has not been treated to kill germs.
- You have contact with flies that are carrying the disease.

What are the symptoms?

Attacks of shigellosis are sudden and severe. The symptoms start about 12 hours to 3 days after you are exposed to the bacteria.

Symptoms may include:

- High fever that may reach 104°F (40°C)
- Cramps or tenderness in your belly
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhea with blood, mucus, and pus
- Pain in the rectum

If the infection spreads to the nervous system it can cause meningitis. Meningitis is an infection of the covering of the brain and spinal cord. Symptoms of meningitis may include:

- Headache
- Stiff neck
- Confusion
- Loss of balance

- Seizures
- Coma

Meningitis can be fatal.

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms and medical history and examine you. A sample of bowel movement may be sent to the lab for testing.

How is it treated?

Mild infections may get better without antibiotic medicine, but your provider may prescribe an antibiotic to keep others from getting infected, especially if you spend time around children or older adults. If you are generally in good health, you will feel better within a week.

If you have a severe infection, or it spreads to your brain or kidneys, you will need to stay at the hospital for treatment.

How can I take care of myself?

Follow your healthcare provider's instructions. Take all medicines exactly as prescribed. If you stop taking the antibiotic too soon, your infection may come back.

Here are some things you can do to feel better:

- Rest your stomach and bowel but make sure that you keep getting fluids. You can do this by not eating anything and by drinking clear liquids only. Clear liquids include water, weak tea, fruit juice mixed half and half with water, Jell-O, or clear soft drinks without caffeine (like lemon-lime soda). Stir soda until the bubbles are gone (the bubbles can make vomiting worse). Avoid liquids that are acidic, like orange juice, or caffeinated, like coffee. If you have diarrhea, don't drink milk.
- If you have severe diarrhea, your body can lose too much fluid and you can get dehydrated. Dehydration can be very dangerous, especially for children and older adults. You may also be losing minerals that your body needs to keep working normally. Your healthcare provider may recommend an oral rehydration solution, which is a drink that replaces fluids and minerals.
- You may eat soft, plain foods. Good choices are soda crackers, toast, plain noodles, or rice, cooked cereal, applesauce, and bananas. Eat slowly and avoid foods that are hard to digest or may irritate your stomach, such as foods with acid (like tomatoes or oranges), spicy or fatty food, meats, and raw vegetables. You may be able to go back to your normal diet in a few days.
- If you have cramps or stomach pain, it may help to put a hot water bottle or heating pad on your stomach. Cover the hot water bottle with a towel or set the heating pad on low so you don't burn your skin.
- Rest as much as possible. Sit or lie down with your head propped up. Don't lie flat for at least 2 hours after eating.

- Don't take aspirin, ibuprofen, or other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) without checking first with your healthcare provider. NSAIDs, such as ibuprofen, naproxen, and aspirin, may cause stomach bleeding and other problems. These risks increase with age. Read the label and take as directed. Unless recommended by your healthcare provider, you should not take this medicine for more than 10 days.

Ask your healthcare provider:

- How and when you will hear your test results
- How long it will take to recover
- What activities you should avoid and when you can return to your normal activities
- How to take care of yourself at home
- What symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if you have them

Make sure you know when you should come back for a checkup.

How can I help prevent shigellosis?

Shigellosis can be a serious health threat to you and the people around you. It cannot be treated with many of the antibiotics that are usually used to treat infections. Prevention is very important. These steps can help prevent food poisoning:

- Wash your hands and clean any dishes or utensils before you prepare, cook, serve, or eat food. Keep kitchen counters and other food preparation surfaces clean. Replace used dishcloths and kitchen towels with clean ones often.
- Cover any sore or cut on your hands before preparing food. Use rubber gloves or cover the sore with a clean bandage.
- Make sure the milk, cheese, and juice products you eat and drink have been pasteurized.
- Rinse fresh vegetables and fruits before you eat or cook them.
- Thaw frozen meats in the refrigerator or a microwave. Do not let meat stand at room temperature.
- Cook food thoroughly, especially meat, poultry, and leftovers. Pork should be heated to an internal temperature of at least 160°F (71°C). For whole chickens and turkeys a temperature of 180°F (82°C) is recommended for thigh meat and 170°F (77°C) for breast meat.
- Keep juices from raw meat, poultry, and seafood away from other foods.
- Refrigerate any food you will not be eating right away.
- Wash your hands after you go to the bathroom or touch animals.
- If you take care of young children, wash your hands often and dispose of diapers carefully so that bacteria can't spread to other surfaces or people.
- When you travel to places where contamination is more likely, eat only hot, freshly cooked food. Drink only bottled water and liquids. Avoid tap water and ice or boil water before drinking. Don't eat raw vegetables or unpeeled fruit.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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