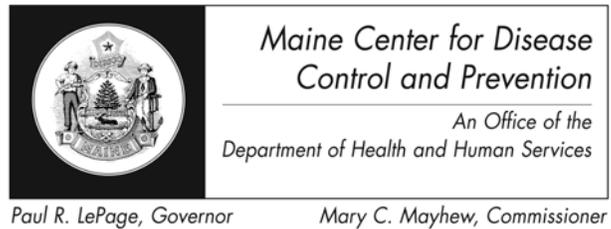


Shigellosis

Fact Sheet



What is shigellosis?

Shigellosis is an illness caused by a group of bacteria called *Shigella*. There are several different types of *Shigella*. One type, *Shigella sonnei*, causes over two-thirds of the cases in the United States. A second type, *Shigella flexneri*, accounts for almost all of the rest. Other types of *Shigella* are rare in this country, but are important causes of disease in the developing world.

How is shigellosis spread?

Shigella bacteria are found in the stools of infected people while they are sick, and for a week or two afterwards. People get shigellosis by swallowing the *Shigella* bacteria. This may happen when someone eats food or drinks water that is contaminated with the bacteria. *Shigella* spreads from person to person when people do not wash their hands with soap and water after using the toilet or changing a diaper. It is particularly likely to spread among toddlers who are not fully toilet-trained. Family members and playmates of these children are at high risk of becoming infected.

How does *Shigella* get into food and water?

Shigella may get into food if it is touched by someone with the disease who doesn't wash their hands well with soap and water after using the toilet. The bacteria may get into vegetables if the vegetables are harvested from a field with sewage in it. The bacteria may get into water if sewage runs into the water or if someone with shigellosis swims in it. Flies can also spread this disease by breeding in infected feces and then touching food.

What are the signs and symptoms of shigellosis?

Most people with shigellosis will get diarrhea, fever, and stomach cramps a day or two after they swallow the bacteria. The diarrhea is often bloody or watery. Symptoms usually end after 5 to 7 days. In some people, especially young children and the elderly, the diarrhea can be so severe that the person needs to be hospitalized. A severe infection with high fever may also be associated with seizures in children less than 2 years old. Some people who are infected may have no

symptoms at all, but may still pass the bacteria to others.

How do I know if I have shigellosis?

Your healthcare provider may ask you for a sample of your stool to test in a laboratory. Laboratory tests can tell which type of *Shigella* a person has and which antibiotics, if any, would be best to treat it.

How is shigellosis treated?

People with mild infections will usually recover quickly without treatment. Antibiotics are sometimes used to treat the most severe cases. Antibiotics may also be given to people who work in places where there is risk of spreading *Shigella* to children, people in hospitals or in large groups. People who work at day care, attend day care or who prepare or serve food to others are sometimes treated. Treatment with antibiotics kills the *Shigella* in a person's stools, and shortens length of illness. Unfortunately, some *Shigella* bacteria have become drug resistant. Medicines to control diarrhea are likely to make the illness worse and should be avoided.

What will happen after I have been infected with *Shigella*?

People with shigellosis usually fully recover, but it may be several months before their bowel habits return to normal. A small number of people who are infected with one type of *Shigella*, *Shigella flexneri*, will later develop pain in their joints, eye irritation, and painful urination that can last for months or years, and can lead to chronic arthritis.

If I've had shigellosis, can I get it again?

Once someone has had shigellosis, they are not likely to get infected with that specific type again for at least several years. However, they can still get infected with other types of *Shigella*.

How can shigellosis be prevented?

- Wash hands well with soap and water carefully and often, especially after using the toilet, changing diapers, and before preparing foods or beverages.

- Throw away soiled diapers properly.
- Clean diaper changing areas with a disinfectant such as household bleach, Lysol or bactericidal wipes after use.
- Keep children with diarrhea out of child care settings.
- Supervise hand washing of toddlers and small children after they use the toilet.
- People with diarrhea should not prepare food or serve water for others.
- If you are traveling to the developing world, "boil it, cook it, peel it, or forget it".
- Avoid swallowing pool water.
- People with diarrhea should not go swimming when ill.

Where can I get more information?

For more information contact your healthcare provider or local health center. You can also contact the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention by calling 1-800-821-5821. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website - <http://www.cdc.gov> – is another excellent source of health information.

How common is shigellosis?

Every year, about 18,000 cases of shigellosis are reported in the United States. Shigellosis is most common in settings where hygiene is poor. It is more common in summer than winter. Children, especially toddlers age 2 to 4 years, are most likely to get shigellosis. Many cases are related to the spread of illness in child-care settings and spread to family members. In the developing world, shigellosis is far more common and is present in most communities most of the time.

Shigellosis in Maine

Shigellosis is not very common in Maine and is most often seen in people who have traveled outside of the country. However, because of the potential for spread of the illness, the Maine CDC immediately investigates all reported cases of shigellosis to identify sources of public health concern and to prevent further spread of the disease. If cases occur in a day-care center, the Maine CDC may need to work with parents and staff to improve hand washing among the staff, children, and their families. If many cases occur at the same time, it may mean that a restaurant, food or water supply has a problem that needs to be fixed. For specific information on the number of shigellosis cases reported in Maine, please visit the Maine CDC website: <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/boh/newpubs.htm> and refer to the Infectious Disease Epidemiology Program Documents.