

# SHIGELLA

## What is Shigella?

Shigellosis is an infectious disease caused by a group of bacteria called Shigella. Most cases of disease in the U.K. are due to infection with a type called *Shigella sonnei*.

## When did I get it?

1 to 3 days after being exposed to the bacterium. It usually resolves itself within 5 to 7 days although in some people, especially the young and the elderly, it may require hospital treatment. Some persons who are infected with *Shigella* don't have any symptoms at all, but may still pass the infection on.

## How did I get it?

- Highly infectious, person to person spread when the bacteria may be passed from one infected person to the next very easily.
- Shigella are present in the stools of infected persons while they are sick and for a week or two after. The bacteria may be transferred underneath the fingernails if hand-washing is not thorough.
- Inanimate objects such as flush handles, taps, changing mats may also act as vectors of transmission if they are contaminated with even microscopic amounts of faeces.
- Contaminated food and water are also capable of causing infection although in this country it only accounts for a minority of cases.
- Due to the method of contracting infection toddlers who are not fully toilet trained are particularly prone to this illness. Adults who care for them and family members are also at high risk of infection.



## What are the signs and symptoms?

- Diarrhoea
- Fever
- Cramping/abdominal pain

## How do I stop it spreading?

- While you are ill and have symptoms you are infectious. You can return to work or school once you have been free from diarrhoea for 48 hours.
- You should tell your employer you have had Shigella



infection if you work with vulnerable groups such as the elderly, the young, those in poor health, or handle food.

- Wash hands thoroughly after going to the toilet and before preparing meals or eating.
- Supervise young children who are infected with hand washing.
- Disinfect all areas in the toilet daily (including door handles, other contact areas).

#### How can I prevent contracting Shigella?

- Frequent and careful hand washing with warm water and soap is the best method of preventing transmission of the bacterium. Young children must be supervised when hand washing. For children who are in nappies, it is important that the nappies are disposed of immediately and that the person who changes the child washes their hands carefully. The changing mat or area should be thoroughly cleaned with a solution such as Milton.
- If someone in the house has Shigellosis it is important to regularly clean the toilet seat, flush handles, wash hand basin, bathroom door handle etc, with dilute bleach. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions regarding dilution and keep the chemicals well out of the reach of children.
- An adult who has Shigellosis should refrain from preparing food for other household members; if possible, for a period of at least 48hrs after their symptoms have stopped. If this is not possible extreme care must be taken with hand washing after using the toilet and before preparing food.



#### Where can I get more advice?

- Your own G.P
- You should inform your place of work or in the case of children, the head teacher of the school to find out if exclusion is necessary and when you can return.