

Shigellosis

What is shigellosis?

Shigella is a germ that causes an infectious disease (also called “shigellosis” or “dysentery”) in your bowel (your digestive system). It can be especially dangerous for the very young and older people.

There are multiple types of shigella infections. Some can cause serious disease and complications, while others are only generally associated with a mild illness. If you have shigella symptoms you will have a test to check if you have it and what type it is.

People from New Zealand are most likely to catch shigella when travelling in developing countries, through eating or drinking contaminated food and water. Within New Zealand it is most commonly passed on between children in day care and school.

How is it spread?

- From eating food or drinking water infected by the shigella germ.
- From the poo (faeces) of people infected by shigella, if people do not properly wash their hands after coming into contact with the germs.

Flies can also spread shigella germs when flying between human faeces to uncovered food.

How to reduce your risk of getting shigella

The best way to reduce your risk of getting shigella is to wash your hands properly.

You should use soapy water for 20 seconds, then dry well with a clean cloth or paper towel. Do this every time you:

- go to the toilet
- prepare food or drinks
- change a babies nappy

People travelling to countries where shigella is common should also:

- avoid unsafe drinking water, including ice and drinks mixed with water
- only drink bottled and boiled water
- avoid food from street stalls
- ensure hot food is well cooked, and eaten while it's still hot

Visit www.safetravel.govt.nz for more information on health advice when traveling abroad.

Symptoms

Symptoms can include:

- diarrhoea
- upset stomach and vomiting
- sometimes blood in the faeces

Symptoms usually start one to three days after you are infected, but can occur any time up to seven days later. Symptoms tend to last for four to seven days.

What should I do if I think I have shigellosis?

Contact your doctor and explain what your symptoms are. If your doctor thinks you have shigellosis they will ask for a faeces sample. This will be tested to check whether you have shigellosis or not, and what type it is.

You may be given antibiotics to beat the infection. You will also need to rest and should drink plenty of water so you do not get dehydrated.

What happens if you test positive?

To reduce the risk of passing on shigella to others you will need to:

- Stay home from work, school or day care. How long will depend on what type of shigella you have:
 - **For shigella *Sonnei*** you can return after you have been symptom free for at least 48 hours (2 days).
 - **For all other types of shigella**, you can return after you have been symptom free for at least 48 hours (2 days), if you do not work in a high-risk job or attend child day care. High risk jobs include anyone working in health care, food preparation or at a day care centre.

If you work in a high-risk job or attend day care you will need to have further tests on your faeces before you can return. These tests will take place at least 48 hours after you have completed any antibiotics course. Two tests will be required, at least 48 hours apart.

- People you live with or have had close contact with may also need to have a test on their faeces, depending on what type of shigella you have. If they have a test and are in a high risk job or attend day care they will need to stay away until they receive a negative test result.

How to reduce the risk of passing on shigella to others

If you test positive for shigella or if you have symptoms you should also:

- wash your hands with soapy water for 20 seconds, then dry well with a clean cloth or paper towel:
 - after going to the toilet
 - before preparing food, eating or drinking
 - before and after changing babies nappies or holding a baby
- avoid sharing food, drinks, spoons and straws.
- not use a pool or swim in a pond while sick if you have diarrhoea
- be extra careful around babies and small children, even if they are in nappies.