

Shigellosis

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What is shigellosis?

Shigellosis is an infection of the bowel caused by the shigella bacteria. It is not common in New Zealand and is usually acquired overseas. Travellers going to developing countries are at risk when they consume food or fluids of doubtful hygiene.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms include:

- watery diarrhoea
- fever
- nausea
- vomiting (sometimes)

In typical cases the faeces contain blood, mucus and pus. Symptoms usually begin 1-3 days after ingesting the bacteria. Dehydration (fluid loss), especially among infants, may be severe.

People may transmit the disease if they don't wash their hands thoroughly after going to the toilet. In rare cases, a person may go on to be a carrier and excrete the bacteria in bowel motions for months.

How is it caught?

Humans are the main host for the shigella bacteria. Common sources of infection are:

- person to person spread from someone who is infected with the bacteria
- eating food that has been contaminated by water, hands and insects
- drinking water or ice that is contaminated by sewage

Travellers should consider the following:

- use only bottled water for drinking and washing teeth. Ask for drinks without ice unless it is made from safe water.
- avoid uncooked food apart from fruits, vegetables and nuts that can be peeled or shelled by you.
- make sure food has been thoroughly and freshly cooked and is piping hot when served.

The general rule when travelling overseas is to "boil it, cook it, peel it, or leave it."

How is it treated?

Usually only fluid replacement and rest are needed. Antibiotics can be given if necessary.

How is spread prevented?

- Wash hands thoroughly after going to the toilet, and especially before eating and before feeding infants.
- Children with diarrhoea should be kept away from other children.
- Anyone nursing or looking after an infected child should pay special attention to their own person hygiene, particularly hand washing.
- Infected children attending crèches, day care centres, kindergartens or schools are subject to certain restrictions.
- Infected food handlers, food handler contacts of cases, health care workers and teachers are also subject to certain restrictions.
- A person with the infection should not swim in a public swimming or spa pool, paddling pool or share bath water with anyone until cleared.

What about staying away from work, school or preschool?

Everyone with this infection should stay away from work/school/preschool while they have symptoms and are unwell. Most people can return after they have been completely free of symptoms for two days.

The following persons, whether they have shigellosis or are a contact of someone who has shigellosis, require clearance from their doctor before they can return to work/school/preschool:

- food handlers
- health care professionals
- staff of early childhood facilities
- children under the age of 5 attending early childhood services
- other adults or children at higher risk due to illness or disability.