

SHIGELLOSIS

What Shigellosis?

Shigellosis is a disease caused by a group of bacteria called Shigella. These bacteria are found worldwide including New Brunswick. They live in the intestines of infected people and are passed in the feces. These bacteria are one of the most common causes of diarrhea.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms usually appear within one to 3 days after a person has become infected with the bacteria. Most persons who become ill have frequent diarrhea, abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting and mild fever. Symptoms usually last a week.

How is Shigellosis spread?

Shigella bacteria are passed in the feces of infected persons and can be found in water and soil contaminated with sewage. Infected food handlers with poor personal hygiene with traces of feces on their hands may contaminate food, including raw food and food handled after cooking. Surfaces can also be contaminated.

The disease is also spread by close personal contact with an infected person, for example infants and young children with poor personal hygiene may pass it to others.

How is Shigellosis diagnosed?

Diagnosis is based on assessment of clinical symptoms by a health care provider and laboratory testing of a stool sample.

Who is at risk of Shigellosis infection?

Anyone exposed to the bacteria can become infected. Young children, the elderly, and persons with weakened immune systems are at greater risk of developing more serious illness.

How can Shigellosis be prevented?

Use good environmental management. Flush or discard any stool in the toilet and clean surrounding area using hot water and detergent. A chlorine-based disinfectant is recommended.

Practice good personal hygiene. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the toilet or changing a diaper, after handling animals or contact with animal feces, and before preparing or eating food. Make sure children wash their hands and caregivers wash their hands after changing diapers.

Take food safety precautions. Wash and/or peel all raw vegetables and fruits before eating. Thoroughly cook all meats. Prevent contact of cooked foods with raw meat. Drink and eat only pasteurized dairy products (milk, cheese, and yogurt).

Drink properly treated water. Avoid swallowing recreational waters from swimming pools. Do not drink untreated surface water from lakes or streams. Test private well drinking water regularly (once or twice per year).

How is Shigellosis treated?

Persons with diarrhea should drink a lot of liquids to avoid dehydration, stay home when ill, and practice good personal hygiene like hand washing. Avoid preparing food for others while you have symptoms and for 48 hours after you recover. Consult your health-care provider for advice and treatment if you have bloody or severe diarrhea; prescription medicines can be used.

What is the Public Health response?

Health-care provider, hospitals and laboratories, schools and childcare centres are required to notify cases to Public Health. Public Health staff may investigate to find out how the infection occurred, identify other people who may be at risk of infection, provide advice as necessary, and implement control measures; including exclusion of infected workers in high risk occupations like persons involved in food handling, direct patient care, and care of the young (daycare) or the elderly (institutional settings).

Further Information

Please contact your health-care provider, local Public Health office or Tele-Care 811.