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Shigellosis Facts



What is shigellosis?

Shigellosis is a bacterial infection of the intestines. If a person eats food or drinks water that is contaminated with the bacteria, he or she can become sick.

What causes shigellosis?

Shigella bacteria are in the intestines of infected people and are shed in their stool. Another person will become infected if they eat or drink food or water contaminated by the stool of an infected person. It can also be spread by direct contact with an infected person.

What are the symptoms of shigellosis?

People exposed to the shigella bacteria may have mild or severe diarrhea, often with fever and traces of blood or mucous in the stool. They may also have nausea and vomiting. Some infected people may not show any symptoms. Symptoms may appear one to seven days after exposure to the bacteria but usually within two to three days. Most people continue to pass shigella in their stool for one to two weeks.

Who is most at risk for shigellosis?

Anyone can get shigellosis but it is recognized more often in young children. Those who may be at greater risk are children in daycare centres, people living or traveling to areas where there is inadequate hygiene or access to clean drinking water, people living in facilities and men who have sex with men.

How is shigellosis treated?

Most people with shigellosis will recover without any treatment. Some may need fluids to prevent dehydration. You may be given antibiotics in certain circumstances such as if your illness is severe or to prevent the spread of shigellosis to others (for example: if you work at a daycare centre or if you prepare food for others, etc).

How can I reduce the risk of shigellosis?

Proper handwashing is important in preventing the spread of shigella, especially after using the toilet, changing diapers and before preparing and eating food. Safe food handling practices such as heating foods to an appropriate temperature, refrigerating foods properly and washing hands and food preparation surfaces will also prevent the spread of the bacteria. Anyone with symptoms should not prepare food for others and should stay home until their diarrhea stops.

Are there any restrictions for people infected with shigella?

People infected with shigella cannot work as food handlers or care providers until they are no longer infected. Children attending a daycare that are infected with shigella cannot return to the daycare until they are no longer infected.

Adapted from: New York State Department of Health

