



**CITY OF PHILADELPHIA  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
DIVISION OF DISEASE CONTROL**

## **SHIGELLOSIS**

### **What is shigellosis?**

Shigellosis is a bacterial infection affecting the intestinal tract. It is a fairly common disease. In recent years, approximately 125 Philadelphia residents have been confirmed to have Shigellosis annually.

### **Who gets shigellosis?**

Anyone can get shigellosis, but it is recognized most often in young children. Those who may be at greater risk include children in day care centers, travelers to certain foreign countries, and individuals living in institutional settings.

### **How is the *Shigella* germ spread?**

*Shigella* germs are found in the intestinal tract of infected people who in turn may contaminate food or water. The *Shigella* germ is spread by eating or drinking contaminated food or water, or by direct contact with an infected person. Sexual practices that allow oral or hand contact with stool (feces) may result in spread. The organism is very infectious. It only takes a small amount of the germ to become sick with this disease.

### **What are the symptoms of *Shigella*?**

Symptoms include mild or severe diarrhea, which may be watery, often with fever, nausea, and cramps. There may be traces of blood or mucous in the stool. Some infected people may not show any symptoms.

### **How soon after infection do symptoms appear?**

The symptoms may appear one to seven days after exposure, but usually within two to three days

## **When and for how long is a person able to spread shigellosis?**

Most people pass *Shigella* in their stool (feces) for one to four weeks. Certain antibiotics may shorten this time to a few days.

## **How is shigellosis diagnosed?**

Shigellosis is diagnosed by isolating the bacteria from a patient's stool (feces).

## **What is the treatment for shigellosis?**

Most people with shigellosis will recover on their own. Some may require fluids to prevent dehydration. Antibiotics are occasionally used to treat severe cases or shorten the carrier phase, which may be important for food handlers, children in day care, or institutionalized individuals.

## **Should an infected person be isolated or excluded from school?**

Since the shigellosis bacteria is passed in the stool (feces) of an infected person, people with diarrhea who participate in activities where there is a high risk of disease transmission (daycare; food handlers; nursing homes) should be excluded. These individuals must obtain the approval of the Health Department before returning to their routine activities. This requires follow-up stool testing to be sure that they are no longer infectious. Most infected people may return to work or school when their stools become formed, as long as they carefully wash their hands after using the toilet. In addition, caretakers of infected individuals who are unable to control their bowel habits (infants, young children, certain handicapped individuals) should practice careful hand washing to prevent acquiring disease themselves.

## **What can be done to prevent the spread of shigellosis?**

Since germs are passed in stool (feces), the single most important prevention activity is careful hand washing after using the toilet or changing diapers.