

Shigellosis Fact Sheet

What is shigellosis?

Foodborne illness can be caused when contaminated water or food is eaten. Shigellosis is an infectious disease caused by strains of bacteria called *Shigella*. *Shigella* are present in the stool of infected people.

What are the symptoms of shigellosis infection?

Symptoms of shigellosis infection usually begin 8 to 50 hours after exposure. Symptoms include stomach pain, watery diarrhea, fever, nausea, and sometimes vomiting, cramps, and blood poisoning. The diarrhea is often bloody (hemorrhagic colitis). Most people get better within 5-7 days. A small number of individuals with shigellosis develop pain in their joints that can last for months or years. This is called reactive arthritis. Young children, the elderly, and people with weak immune systems are at especially high risk for the illness to develop more severe complications, including potentially life-threatening dehydration, intestinal perforation, and hemolytic uremic syndrome.

How is shigellosis spread?

Shigellosis can be spread through food or water that has been contaminated with the stool of an infected person. Methods of contamination can include:

- eating food directly or indirectly contaminated by stool from an infected person,
- eating food prepared or served by an infected person who does not practice good personal hygiene, and
- using, drinking, swimming in, or playing in untreated or sewage-contaminated water.

Ready-to-eat foods, including raw vegetables, salads, and sandwiches, are commonly linked to outbreaks from *Shigella*. In addition, flies can breed in infected stool and then directly contaminate food or food contact surfaces.

Why is shigellosis important for child nutrition professionals?

People working with food who are sick with shigellosis can easily make others ill. A sick child nutrition employee can contaminate the food he or she is handling. Many of those eating the contaminated food may become ill, resulting in an outbreak. People infected with shigellosis are typically contagious while they are sick and for up to two weeks afterwards. It is important for people to always use good handwashing and other hygienic practices, especially after they have recently recovered from shigellosis.

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How can shigellosis be prevented?

- Wash your hands thoroughly after using the restroom or changing diapers and before preparing or eating food.
- Avoid bare hand contact with ready-to-eat and ready-to-serve foods.
- Report symptoms of diarrhea and vomiting, diagnosis of shigellosis or exposure within the past 3 days to others with shigellosis to your manager and/or director.
- Do not work when you have these symptoms.
- Wash raw fruits and vegetables under clean, running water. Ensure produce is purchased from a safe supplier.
- Prevent and eliminate flies in food storage, preparation, and service areas.
- Wash, rinse, and sanitize all food contact surfaces, using potable (clean) water, before using and between uses.
- Cook poultry, meat, and eggs thoroughly, and use a thermometer to test for correct cooking temperature.

This fact sheet is part of a series of six fact sheets on foodborne illness control and prevention.

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This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service through an agreement with the Institute of Child Nutrition at the University of Mississippi. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.

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Suggested Reference Citation: Institute of Child Nutrition. (2018). *Shigellosis fact sheet*. University, MS: Author.

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