



COUNTY OF ORANGE HEALTH CARE AGENCY

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***Shigella* Frequently Asked Questions**

modified from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website
<https://www.cdc.gov/Shigella>, last accessed 12/26/1018

What is *Shigella*?

Shigella are a group of bacteria (germs) that cause illness with symptoms such as diarrhea, fever and/or stomach cramps.

How is shigellosis spread?

Shigella bacteria are in the stool (“poop”) of infected people when they have diarrhea and for up to a couple weeks after the diarrhea has gone away. *Shigella* are very infectious; it only takes a small number of germs to make someone sick. People can get shigellosis when they touch or put something in their mouth after coming into contact with the stool of an infected person, such as:

- Touching surfaces contaminated with stool from an infected person, such as toys, bathroom fixtures, or changing tables;
- Changing the diapers of an infected child or caring for an infected person;
- Eating food prepared by someone who is infected with *Shigella*;
- Having sexual contact with someone who is infected.

How common is *Shigella* infection?

According to the CDC, approximately 500,000 illnesses occur due to *Shigella* annually in the United States. In Orange County, there are approximately 70-85 *Shigella* cases reported each year.

What are the symptoms of *Shigella*?

Most people infected with *Shigella* develop diarrhea (sometimes bloody), fever, and stomach cramps between 1 to 2 days after exposure to the bacteria. Infected persons can have severe, mild, or no symptoms. Illness usually lasts 5 to 7 days, but may continue for weeks and some people do not have normal stools for months.



Photo Source CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/shigella/images/shigella-1184px.jpg>

Who is at highest risk for *Shigella* infection?

People of all ages are affected by *Shigella* but young children are the most likely to get infected. Many outbreaks have been reported in childcare settings and within households because it is so contagious. Other groups that are more likely to acquire infection are travelers to developing countries, men who have sex with men, and people living in crowded conditions. People with weakened immune systems are the most likely to have severe infections.

How are *Shigella* infections diagnosed?

Diagnosing shigellosis requires testing a clinical specimen (generally stool) from an infected person to distinguish it from other illnesses that can cause diarrhea, fever, and stomach cramps.

How are *Shigella* infections treated?

People with *Shigella* infection usually get better on their own in 5 to 7 days. Most do not require treatment other than oral fluids but people with severe diarrhea may require intravenous fluids and hospitalization. Over-the-counter medications such as bismuth subsalicylate (Pepto-Bismol) may be helpful but people with shigellosis should NOT use medications that cause the gut to slow down or that interfere with the way the body digests food, such as loperamide (Imodium) or diphenoxylate with atropine (Lomotil).

Treatment with antibiotics is recommended for people who have severe symptoms or who have a weakened immune system; antibiotics may help get them to get better and not be infectious sooner. However some *Shigella* bacteria can be resistant to specific antibiotic types. Testing can be done to determine which antibiotics are likely to work.

How can I decrease the risk of getting infected with *Shigella*?

There is no vaccine to prevent shigellosis. The spread of *Shigella* can be decreased by frequent and careful handwashing with soap and water, especially after going to the bathroom or changing a diaper, and before preparing or eating food. Young children should be supervised in handwashing after they go to the bathroom. Other steps to decrease the risk of getting infected with *Shigella* include avoiding having sex for at least one week after your partner recovers from diarrhea and following safe sexual practices in general.

People with shigellosis should not prepare or handle food or drink for others until their diarrhea has resolved. Orange County Public Health requires that food service (e.g., restaurant) workers, and people in certain other occupations/settings such as health care or child care, with *Shigella* infection have stool tests showing that they are no longer carrying the *Shigella* bacterium before they return to work.