



## Shire of Denmark

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# Shigella

## What is *Shigella*?

The term *Shigella* is given to a group of bacteria that are known to be harmful to man and gives rise to symptoms such as:

**Diarrhoea**

**Nausea**

**Fever**

**Vomiting and cramps**

There is usually a period of 1 to 7 days after eating infected food before symptoms develop. The elderly, infants and those with impaired immune systems are more likely to have a more severe illness.

Patients may remain an asymptomatic carrier of the infection for up to 4 weeks. During this time there is the potential to transmit the infection to other people.

## Where does *Shigella* come from?

Infection is by direct or indirect faecal-oral transmission from a patient or carrier. Infection may occur after the ingestion of only a very few bacteria.

Individuals primarily responsible for transmission are those who fail to clean their hands correctly, especially under their fingernails, after visiting the toilet.

They may then spread the infection to others by direct physical contact or by contaminating

food. Water, milk and fly-borne transmission may occur as the result of direct faecal contamination.

## Treatment

Often it is better for the body to fight food poisoning itself, so doctors may not prescribe any treatment unless symptoms are severe and continuous. Usually the body will rid itself of the infection within a couple of weeks. It is important for the patient to drink plenty of water during this time.

*Shigella* bacteria can remain in the body after symptoms of food poisoning have disappeared. There is always a possibility that the infection could be passed to other people. The Environmental Health Officer may ask the patient to provide follow up specimens of faeces for analysis. Patients are asked to provide faecal specimens until 3 prove to be *shigella* negative.

## Preventing *Shigella* food poisoning

### 1. Hand washing

Hands must be thoroughly washed after visiting the toilet or handling a baby's nappy.

*Shigella* present in the bowel of an infected person can be transmitted to other people if strict regard is not paid to personal hygiene.

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### 2. Prevention of contaminated food

It is important to keep food protected against flies, which may transmit *Shigella* and other types of food poisoning. Keep food covered or in the refrigerator at all times. Provide fly screening to doors and windows wherever possible.

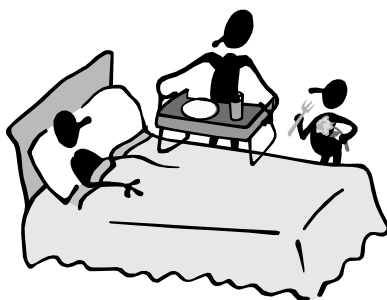
### 3. Exclusion of infected persons

It is important that people infected with *Shigella* do not handle food. The infection may be transmitted to those eating the food. Food handlers and children attending day care centres must remain home until follow-up specimens have been submitted and proven negative or a course of treatment completed. Infected people should also not swim in pools as they may transfer the infection to other swimmers.

**What can be done to prevent *Shigella*?**

It is important for your local Environmental Health Officer at the Shire of Denmark to know about cases of *Shigella*. If many cases occur at the same time, it may mean that a restaurant, food or water supply has a problem that requires investigation by an Environmental Health Officer.

Better education of food industry workers in food safety and restaurant inspection procedures also prevent cross-contamination and other food handling errors that can lead to infection.



**\*\* DISCLAIMER \*\***

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