

Shigella

County Medical Officers' infection prevention sheet, patient information

What is Shigella?

Shigella is an intestinal bacterium which can cause severe diarrhoea, which is sometimes bloody or contains mucus, as well as abdominal pain and fever. The extent of the symptoms varies, and it is also possible to be a carrier of the infection with no symptoms at all. The time between infection and falling ill is usually two to three days. Shigella is often treated with antibiotics so as to alleviate the symptoms and reduce the risk of contagion.

How is the disease transmitted, and when are carriers infectious?

The bacterium is present in faeces and can be transmitted from person to person. This is why it is important to take care with hand and toilet hygiene. Patients are most contagious when they are suffering from diarrhoea, but it is possible to remain contagious when the diarrhoea has subsided. Contaminated food and drink is a common transmission route. The bacterium is destroyed by heating, which is why food which is well boiled or fried does not generally present a risk. Remember that cooked food can be contaminated. Deep freezing does not destroy the bacterium. It affects only humans, not animals. Most people who contract shigella are infected while travelling abroad. The infection can also spread in Sweden, and the source of the infection is often a person who has been infected abroad or vegetables/fruit which have been grown abroad.

Anyone who is free of symptoms can often remain at work or school by following the rules of conduct and hygiene advice below. However, some professions require redeployment or suspension until you are deemed to be free of infection.

What should you remember so as not to infect others? Rules of conduct and hygiene advice:

- You must not work as long as you have diarrhoea.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after visiting the toilet, before handling foods and before meals.
- Use liquid soap and your own towel or single-use towels.
- Keep the toilet and washbasin clean.
- If children in nappies are carriers of the disease, wash your hands thoroughly after changing their nappies. Keep your changing table very clean. Place used nappies in plastic bags which are then discarded with the rest of your refuse.
- Children suffering from diarrhoea must not attend preschool, and they must not return there until they have submitted a stool sample which does not show the growth of shigella.
- You must not swim in a pool while you have diarrhoea.
- If you work with unpackaged foods, according to European food legislation you are obliged to notify your supervisor immediately if you are infectious.

People in the following risk professions are obliged to submit stool samples, and they must be redeployed or suspended until they are deemed by their doctor to be free of infection:

- Anyone who prepares or handles unpackaged foods in a professional capacity
- Anyone who cares for infants or severely immunocompromised patients in a professional capacity

Infection with shigella is what is known as a public health hazard according to the Swedish Communicable Diseases Act. Therefore, you are obliged to follow the rules of conduct given to you by your doctor and to assist with contact tracing which aims to locate the source of the infection or other people who may have been infected.

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You may request reassessment of the rules of conduct by the County Medical Officer in your county. You must follow the rules assigned to you before any such assessment is complete.