

Shigellosis

What is shigellosis?

Shigellosis is an infection of the bowel caused by a group of bacteria called *Shigella*. There are 4 types of *Shigella*; 1 type, *dysenteriae*, can cause very severe disease but is fortunately very rare in the Northern Territory.

How is it spread?

Spread occurs when hands, objects (such as toys), food or water contaminated by tiny amounts of faeces from infected people are put into the mouth of an uninfected person.

What are the symptoms?



Symptoms generally develop between 1 to 3 days after becoming infected but it may take up to a week for symptoms to appear.



Most people who are infected with *Shigella* develop diarrhoea (sometimes with blood or mucus), fever, vomiting and stomach cramps.



Typically, the illness lasts 3 to 4 days but, especially in the very young, elderly and malnourished people, may last longer.



Some infected people only have a very mild illness or no symptoms at all.

What is the infectious period?



While the *Shigella* bacteria remains in their faeces, infected people can pass the

infection on to others. This is usually while they are ill and up to 4 weeks after symptoms have resolved. Infected people without symptoms can transmit infection. Occasionally, people without symptoms can shed *Shigella* in their faeces for many months.

Who is at risk?

The most severe infections occur in the very young, the elderly and malnourished people.

Children who attend childcare facilities are at greater risk of infections spread through faeces contamination. Spread occurs when children share toys or food that has become contaminated and place it in their mouths. Particular care has to be taken wherever there are children in nappies.

What is the treatment?

Anyone with diarrhoea should drink extra fluids to avoid dehydration. Children with diarrhoea, who vomit or who refuse extra fluids should see a doctor. Anyone with prolonged or severe diarrhoea or who have symptoms that concern them, should see a doctor.

Medicines to prevent vomiting or diarrhoea should not be given, especially to children, except where specifically advised by a doctor.



How can shigellosis be prevented?

Good hygiene is the best way to prevent shigellosis.

Hands should be washed thoroughly with warm soapy water:

- after going to the toilet
- before preparing or handling food
- after every nappy change
- after changing soiled linen

Other measures include:

- never change nappies on tables or counters where food is prepared or eaten
- clean change areas with warm soapy water and disinfectant after every nappy change
- clean books, toys, equipment, furnishings, floors and toilets regularly (including toilet door handles)
- wash raw fruit and vegetables carefully before eating

People with diarrhoea should not prepare or handle food that will be eaten by others.

How can it be controlled?

Anyone with diarrhoea should not attend childcare/school/work until the diarrhoea has ceased.

Anyone with diarrhoea should not swim, wade or paddle in public pools.

For more information contact your nearest Centre for Disease Control.

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| Darwin | 8922 8044 |
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| Nhulunbuy | 8987 0359 |
| Tennant Creek | 8962 4259 |
| Alice Springs | 8951 7549 |

Disease Control fact sheets on various topics are available by contacting your nearest centre or from our web site at <http://www.nt.gov.au/health/cdc>