

# ***Shigella*: What you need to know**



## **What is *Shigella*?**

Shigellosis is an infection caused by a germ, *Shigella*, that infects the intestine. People with *Shigella* may experience mild or severe diarrhea often with stomachaches, cramps, fever, and nausea. There may be blood or pus in the diarrhea. If you or a member of your family has any of these complaints, he/she should see your family doctor and get tested for *Shigella*.

## **How does *Shigella* spread?**

*Shigella* is spread several ways. It is usually spread from people who are infected with this germ, who pass the bacteria in their bowel movements (stool). If infected persons do not wash their hands well, this germ can get into the food or drink they are handling, and others can then get sick by eating this food or drink. People can also get this germ on their hands when changing diapers or assisting a child with toileting. Only a few germs may cause infection, and the germ is easily spread.

## **Who can get *Shigella* and how is it diagnosed?**

Anyone can get this infection. Symptoms may start 1-7 days after being exposed to the germ. Most symptoms start within 2-4 days. A doctor can determine if someone has this infection by collecting a stool sample and seeing if the bacteria grows in the laboratory. This test may be called a stool culture, or a rectal swab culture.

## **How is *Shigella* treated?**

Several antibiotics may be used to treat this infection. Your doctor will prescribe the most appropriate antibiotic for this illness. Treatment with antibiotics will shorten the length of the illness and help to clear the germ from the stool.

## **How can *Shigella* be prevented?**

Since germs are passed in stool, the single most important prevention activity is careful hand washing after using the toilet, assisting a child with the toilet, or changing diapers, and before preparing food. Young children should be supervised using the toilet to make sure that they wash their hands afterwards. All children should wash hands after using the toilet and before eating.

If you have additional questions, contact your family doctor or the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, Division of Disease Control at 215-685-6741.