Central Michigan District Health Department
"Promoting Healthy Families, Healthy Communities"

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Shigellosis

What is Shigellosis?

Shigellosis is a disease caused by a bacterial germ that gets into the intestines. This is one of the easiest germs to give to others because it only takes a few germs to make you sick. The germ is found in a person's bowel movements, in food or water contaminated by an infected person, swallowing recreational water contaminated with Shigella or by touching a surface that has been touched by a person who is sick. People spread it to others when they do not wash their hands after using the bathroom or changing the diaper of a child with this illness. People can spread the disease until the germ is no longer present in their stools, usually within 1 – 2 weeks after illness. Signs and symptoms usually begin 1 – 2 days after exposure. Symptoms may last for 5 – 7 days.

What are the symptoms of Shigellosis?

- stomach ache
- fever
- diarrhea (many loose stools) that may contain blood, pus and mucus
- constant pressure to have bowel movement

What should I do if I have these symptoms?

The only way to find out if you have this germ is to see your doctor. You may be asked to bring with you a sample of your bowel movement (stool). It will be checked for the Shigella germ. If you do have Shigellosis, the doctor may ask other family members to be checked for the germ.

What is the treatment for Shigellosis?

Diarrhea caused by Shigella usually goes away without treatment. However, your doctor may choose to give you medicine to take. Make sure you use all the medicine as prescribed. Your doctor may want to check another bowel movement sample after you have finished the medicine to make sure that you are cured. It is important to continue drinking liquids like clear juices, broth, jello, tea or pop. This usually runs its course in 5 – 7 days.

How can I guard against the spread of Shigellosis?

Thorough hand washing is the single most important measure to prevent giving the germ to others.

If you have the germ:

- **WASH YOUR HANDS after using the bathroom.**
- **WASH YOUR HANDS before and after preparing food.**
- **WASH YOUR HANDS before eating.**
- **WASH YOUR HANDS after changing diapers.**
- **WASH YOUR HANDS AND THEIR HANDS after changing diapers.**
- TEACH YOUR CHILDREN HOW TO WASH THEIR HANDS
- KEEP YOUR BATHROOM CLEAN – Use 1 part bleach to 10 parts water to clean surfaces, faucets, flusher and doorknobs.
- WASH soiled diapers (cloth), sheets or clothing in hot soapy water and dry in a dryer.
- SEAL disposable diapers in a plastic bag and put in a tightly closed garbage can (this helps keep animals from scattering the soiled items and possibly spreading the germ to others).
- Do not go swimming until two weeks after diarrhea has ended.
- DO NOT allow contact with other children outside the family until your child is cured.

Is Shigellosis a problem?

Shigellosis can lead to serious problems if not treated. In some cases, the diarrhea can lead to loss of body fluids. The dehydration (loss of water) can be a problem, so it is important that people with Shigellosis (especially babies and small children) continue to drink fluids. Shigellosis can cause serious bowel (intestine) problems and does need to be evaluated by your doctor if symptoms do not go away.

Special Considerations

- Because it only takes a few germs to make you sick, employees with Shigella should not be allowed to handle food or provide child or patient care until two successive negative stools are obtained. Consult with your local health department when employees may return to work.
- Children should not return to school or daycare until approved by the local health department.