

Patient Instructions: Information about shigella infection

You have been diagnosed with a bowel infection caused by the shigella bacteria. It is a generally hazardous communicable disease. Examinations, treatment, and all prescription medicines for shigella are free of charge.

How does shigella spread?

A very small number of bacteria is enough to get infected with shigella, so the disease easily spreads by hands. Transmission is also possible orally by eating contaminated food or by drinking or swimming in contaminated water. The bacteria also spread in sexual contact. Risk of infection is high between people who live in the same household.

Symptoms

The incubation period of the disease is 1 to 7 days. The symptoms include (bloody) diarrhea, fever, nausea, vomiting and stomach ache. The disease usually lasts less than a week. However, people may carry the bacteria in their feces for up to 4–6 weeks.

Diagnostics and treatment

Shigella bacteria are diagnosed from a stool sample (F-BaktVIP). The need for antibiotics depends on the symptoms and any underlying illnesses. The diarrhea caused by shigella does not usually require hospitalisation.

Preventing transmission

- Wash your hands with water and soap (liquid soap), especially after using the toilet and changing diapers, and before meals. Use a personal towel or disposable paper towels to dry your hands. If you cannot wash your hands, use hand disinfectant.
- If people living in the same household have several toilets available, it is recommended that one toilet is designated to the people with symptoms. If a child that uses diapers is ill, pack used diapers in a separate plastic bag before taking them to the trash. Remember to maintain good hand hygiene.
- Do not prepare food for other people. Wash your dishes, the toilet, and laundry as usual. Laundry that is soiled with feces must be washed in at least 60 degrees Celsius.
- Avoid sexual contact while symptomatic and for at least 7 days after the symptoms have ended (or until your follow-up tests are negative). As shigella may be present in the feces for several weeks, you should wear a condom or abstain from sexual contact during this time.

Instructions to infected people and close contacts

- A child with symptoms of a stomach flu is not allowed in day care (early childhood education). A child with a shigella infection may return to day care once the infection is confirmed to be over by a follow-up test. The communicable diseases unit in your wellbeing services county will provide you more detailed instructions on the follow-up tests.
- If an infected person works in an at-risk profession (e.g. food industry, care for the elderly or newborn babies), the communicable diseases unit in your wellbeing services county will provide you more detailed instructions on the follow-up tests, returning to work, or rearrangement of your work.
- Generally, people with symptoms of a stomach flu should not go to school or work (when not in an at-risk profession), until at least 48 hours after the symptoms have stopped. Follow-up samples are not needed.
- Close contacts of an infected person will need to provide a stool sample if they have symptoms of a shigella infection. Based on a risk assessment, even asymptomatic close contacts can be tested.

Further information in Finnish

- www.thl.fi Shigella