

INFORMATION ABOUT

SHIGELLA DYSENTERY

What is dysentery?

Dysentery is an infection usually spread from person to person caused by bacteria called "shigella". It causes inflammation of the bowel, which gives bloody diarrhoea, headache, fever, nausea and sometimes vomiting and stomach cramps. These symptoms usually only last for a few days, and need no treatment other than rest and plenty to drink (water or dilute squash are best). After the acute illness people may still carry the germ for a while, even though they feel better. Some people may have no symptoms at all, but still have the germ. Shigella is a common cause of diarrhoea in people returning from abroad.

Why worry about it?

DYSENTERY IS VERY INFECTIOUS!

Young children, the elderly, or those with pre-existing illness who catch dysentery can be really ill and are particularly susceptible to the disease. It spreads very easily in a household unless adequate precautions are taken. It may be necessary to keep children who are carrying the germ away from school; and adults in certain jobs (see later*) may be asked to stay away from work for a period to prevent the spread of infection.

How do we stop dysentery from spreading?

Dysentery is usually spread from person-to-person.

As the germs are present in the bowel motions, and only a few germs are needed to spread dysentery **it is most important to be scrupulously hygienic after using the toilet and make sure that you wash your hands thoroughly:**

- Wash hands with soap and water, and clean nails with a nailbrush. Hands should be washed before handling or eating food, and also before caring for children, the elderly or patients
- If caring for someone with dysentery, hands should be washed after contact with that person and before contact with the next:
- Potties, seats and handles of WC's, taps and bathroom door handles should be regularly cleaned. If the toilet has a lid it should be placed down, covering the toilet before it is flushed.
- Towels should not be shared.
- Sinks and bowls used for preparing food or washing crockery should **not** be used for personal washing or soiled laundry.

What might I be asked to do?

Because dysentery can spread **so easily** and the germ can still be carried by someone without symptoms, or someone who is no longer ill, you may be asked to provide a "stool" specimen (specimen of the bowel motion) to test for the bacteria.

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People should not return to work or school whilst they still have diarrhoea. People who work with open food, or children in nursery and infant schools should not return until they have had normal stools for at least 48 hours.

In certain cases it may be necessary to keep some people off work or school until they no longer carry the germ (when 2 clear specimens have been obtained).

Any foodhandler returning to work after suffering from dysentery should be scrupulous in their hand washing, especially after visiting the toilet.

What should I do if I think someone has dysentery?

If **you** have any of the symptoms described earlier, especially bloody diarrhoea you should **stay off work or school**, rest and drink plenty. If you think **your children** may have dysentery, **keep them away from nursery or school** until they have had no further symptoms for at least 48 hours.

High Risk Occupations

1. **Food handlers** whose work involves touching unwrapped foods to be consumed raw or without further cooking.
2. **Health care, nursery or other staff** who have direct contact, or contact through serving food, high susceptible patients or persons, in whom an intestinal infection would have particularly serious consequences.

More Information

Do not hesitate to contact your GP if you are worried or would like more advice on what to do.

If you would like any further information or advice, please contact :

South Yorkshire Health Protection Unit
Meadow Court
Hayland Street
SHEFFIELD
S9 1BY

Tel: 0114 242 8850