

# Shigellosis

## The disease

Shigellosis is a bacterial infection of the intestinal tract. It is a well-known cause of a traveler's diarrhea and illness throughout the world. It accounts for 10-20% of all cases of diarrhea worldwide. In any given year it infects over 140 million persons and kills 600,000, mostly children and the elderly.

## Causes

- Contaminated milk, ice cream, vegetables and other foods
- Household contacts of infected persons
- Poor hygiene and overcrowded living conditions
- Daycare centers
- Sexual practices which lead to oral-anal contact, directly or indirectly

## Symptoms

The incubation period of *Shigella* is one to four days. In children, onset is sudden with the following symptoms:

- Fever
- Irritability
- Drowsiness
- Anorexia
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Abdominal pain
- Painful spasm of diaphragm with desire to empty the bowel or bladder

Within three days, blood, pus and mucus may appear in stools. The number of stools generally increases rapidly to more than 20 per day. Weight loss and dehydration may become severe as the number of stools increase. If untreated a child may die in the first 12 days. If the child survives, acute symptoms subside by the second week.

In adults the disease usually resolves spontaneously in mild cases within four to eight days and in severe cases in three to six weeks. Significant dehydration and electrolyte loss with circulatory collapse and death is limited mainly to infants less than two years of age and to debilitated adults.

## Treatment

Shigellosis is usually treated with antibiotics, the appropriate treatment kills the bacteria that might be in patient's intestine and shortens the illness.