

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs): Shigellosis Disease in Gay, Bisexual, and Men who have Sex with Men

Recent LA County data shows more cases than usual among gay, bisexual and men who have sex with men (MSM). This sheet describes the disease, symptoms, treatment and prevention.



1. What is shigellosis?

Shigellosis is an infectious (spread person to person) disease that is caused by a bacteria (germ) called Shigella. The germ is found in stool (poop) of infected people and can cause severe diarrhea. Shigellosis is mostly spread through sexual or casual contact (shaking hands) with an infected person. It isn't usually life threatening, but it can lead to severe dehydration (when your body loses water) and other serious health risks.

2. Who is at risk for shigellosis?

Anyone can get shigellosis, but gay, bisexual, and MSM are at a higher risk than other people. People with a weakened immune system, like people with HIV, can also be at a higher risk.

3. How does shigellosis spread?

Shigellosis can spread through casual or sexual contact with an infected person. It can spread when an infected person doesn't wash their hands after passing stool (pooping) and has casual contact with other people, like shaking hands. It can also spread through sexual contact with an infected person. Shigellosis can spread when feces (poop) comes into contact with your mouth during oral-anal sex with an infected person.

4. What are the symptoms of shigellosis?

- Stomach pain
- Bloody stool (poop)
- Vomiting
- Painful feeling of needing to poop
- Diarrhea
- Nausea
- Stomach cramps

5. How can you prevent shigellosis?

Here are some healthy habits to help prevent the disease:

- Wash hands with soap and warm water
- Use condoms during oral sex and oral-anal sex
- Avoid having sex when you have diarrhea, especially bloody diarrhea
- Avoid drinking pool or pond water
- Don't prepare food for others if you have diarrhea

6. How is this disease treated?

People with mild shigellosis usually recover without treatment. Drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration. There are medicines for people who have more severe cases of shigellosis. Treatment is recommended for people with weak immune systems. Talk to your doctor if you are experiencing fever and severe diarrhea for more than 5 to 7 days.

For more information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) <http://www.cdc.gov/shigella/msm.html>

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