

Shigella Dysentery Fact Sheet

What is Dysentery?

Dysentery is an infection of the intestines (gut). There are two types of dysentery - amoebic and bacillary. This leaflet is about bacillary dysentery, which is the commonest form and is caused by a bacterium known as Shigella.

What are the symptoms of Dysentery?

The most common symptoms are:

- diarrhoea
- fever
- stomach cramps

The symptoms can take up to a week to show after catching the infection, but usually begin within one to three days. Symptoms generally last for several days, but can last for weeks. Some people only have mild illness and others do not get any symptoms at all. However, people without symptoms still have bacteria in their stools and can spread infection to others if they are not careful.

Where does Dysentery come from?

The infection comes from other humans. It is found in every country, but is more common where standards of hygiene are poor. For this reason, many infections in the UK affect people who have recently travelled abroad.

How do I catch Dysentery?

The dysentery bacteria must be swallowed to cause disease. Dysentery is often spread when infected people do not wash and dry their hands properly after using the toilet or changing nappies. It can spread very easily within families when hand hygiene is not adequate. In countries where dysentery is more common, food and water can become contaminated.

How will I know if I have Dysentery?

Your doctor may ask you to provide a stool sample, which will be sent to a laboratory and tested. Dysentery is confirmed by growing Shigella bacteria from your sample. The test takes a few days.

How can I avoid Dysentery?

If you are looking after someone with diarrhoea, you must wash your hands with soap and hot water and dry your hands thoroughly after cleaning the bathroom, helping the person use the toilet, or changing nappies or soiled sheets.

The risk of getting Dysentery is higher when travelling in countries where the disease is common. Travellers, especially in Asia, Africa and South America, should avoid high-risk foods and drinks as far as possible:

- Avoid raw vegetables and salads, and fruits that cannot be peeled

- Avoid drinks with ice and ice cream
- Sterilise tap water before drinking (e.g. boil, or use sterilising tablets), or drink carbonated bottled water
- Be wary of food from street vendors
- Choose food that is thoroughly cooked and piping hot
- **BOIL IT, PEEL IT, COOK IT OR OTHERWISE AVOID IT!**

What special care should I take if I have Dysentery?

You should wash your hands carefully with soap and water and dry your hands thoroughly each time you go to the toilet; this reduces the chances of passing on the infection to other people. You should avoid preparing food for other people while you are ill.

How long should I stay off school or work?

- Most adults and children over five years should stay away from work until they are feeling better.
- People working with food must stay off work until they have been symptom free for two days. You must tell your employer about your illness.
- People working with vulnerable groups e.g. the young, elderly or those in poor health, must stay off work until they are symptom free.
- Young children should stay away from playgroups, childminders or nursery school until they are symptom free.

Who cares if I have Dysentery?

Your GP and your local Environmental Health Officer care.

Your GP will give you advice about the medical aspects of Dysentery. Your local Environmental Health Officer may also contact you and offer advice and ask some questions to try to find out where you acquired the illness.

For further information and advice, please contact:

Department: Environmental Health Department

Phone: 020 8547 5002

e-mail: environmental.health@rbk.kingston.gov.uk

Address: Guildhall, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey, KT1 1EU

Website: www.kingston.gov.uk