

# Shigella



## WHAT IS SHIGELLA?

“Shigella” refers to a group of bacteria which, through ingestion, causes approximately 14,000 cases of human illness per year in the United States. Yet, because infected individuals may not seek medical attention in many instances, the number of actual cases may be up to twenty times greater than the verified number. About two-thirds of reported cases are caused by a strain known as “Shigella Sonnei,” also referred to as “Group D”; about one-third of reported cases are caused by a strain known as “Shigella Flexneri,” referred to as “Group B.” Shigella is the cause of less than ten percent of foodborne illnesses in the U.S. each year.



## HOW IS SHIGELLA CONTRACTED?

Shigella can be passed from person to person. Food and water sources can become contaminated with infected feces, and their ingestion causes the resulting infection. Food handlers who prepare meals with unwashed hands are a primary cause of outbreaks. To add, outbreaks are often attributed to swallowing water from a source that has been contaminated by sewage. Vegetables grown in and harvested from fields that have been irrigated with water contaminated by sewage are also a common culprit. At times, flies that breed in feces may land on food, contaminating it.



## RECOVERY AND LONG-TERM EFFECTS

Most infected individuals recover without seeking medical attention within five to seven days following discovery of the initial symptoms. Treatment with anti-diarrheal medicines should be avoided, according to the Centers for Disease Control, as its use may make symptoms worse and lengthen recovery time. Antibiotics may lessen the severity of symptoms and shorten the duration of recovery. Antibiotics are often used to treat only the most severe cases, because Shigella has been found to be resistant to antibiotics; regular use of antibiotics to treat Shigella may increase its resistance. It can take up to several months before an individual's intestines return to normal state.



## SYMPTOMS

Symptoms include diarrhea, which is often bloody, fever, and stomach ache. However, some infected individuals may suffer from no symptoms at all.



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